

FORUM ON MAKING DISCIPLES WEDNESDAY | FEBRUARY 19, 2025



THE JESUS CLIMB — RESTORING STUDENT'S HOPE IN THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL

FORUM PRESENTER: GARY DAVID STRATTON

DEAN OF THE SCHOOL OF ARTS & SCIENCES | JOHNSON UNIVERSITY (TN)

OVERVIEW: Today's students present biblical higher learning communities with unprecedented challenges—hopelessness, depression, anxiety, social media addiction, relational isolation, biblical illiteracy, etc. Yet the greatest crisis facing biblical higher education today might be our students' crisis of confidence in the power of the gospel to transform their lives and their world.

This forum is designed for faculty, academic leaders, student life professionals, and campus ministers determined to meet this crisis by re-examining our incomplete understanding of Jesus's teaching on discipleship. Then, we will use this new perspective to re-envision our students, re-chart their pathway to spiritual maturity, and refocus our institutional efforts to reinforce this pathway.

7:00 – 8:00

Forum Breakfast — Regency Foyer

8:00 – 8:15

Welcome & Introductions

8:15 – 9:30 SESSION ONE — RE-EXAMINING THE MEANING OF DISCIPLESHIP IN JESUS' DAY AND HOW IT RELATES TO THE STRUGGLES FACING BIBLICAL HIGHER EDUCATION TODAY

OVERVIEW: Let's examine together how growing up in an era marked by the church's ineffective and often un-Christlike reliance upon the power of programming, celebrity, and politics has resulted in a generation of students who have lost hope in God's power to transform individuals and society. As predicted by hope theory, they no longer seek transformation nor seek to transform their world because they no longer believe such transformation is possible. Yet, Jesus taught his first students that transformation into the kind of people who can join him in his mission to set this broken world right is the pinnacle of genuine discipleship. Consider . . .

- ▶ The meaning of the 286 NT uses of the word "disciple" vs. the three uses of "Christian."
- ▶ The cost of discipleship as synonymous with the Christian life vs. a second step
- ▶ Jesus's upward call to become the kind of person who loves God and neighbor as the secret to transforming the kingdoms of this world

9:30 – 10:15

Refreshment Break — Regency Foyer

10:15 – 11:45

SESSION 2 — RE-ENVISIONING JESUS' CALL UPON OUR STUDENTS AND OUR COLLEGE — TEACHING EVERYTHING JESUS LIVED BY LIVING EVERYTHING JESUS TAUGHT

OVERVIEW: Jesus chose to establish a Jewish rabbinical college *before* he founded his church. This often-overlooked fact is foundational to understanding the mission of all truly *Biblical* higher education. Consider . . .

- ▶ How Jesus' ministry as a Jewish rabbinic college is analogous to biblical higher education today
- ▶ Two primary texts comprised the curriculum of these rabbinical colleges
- ▶ The importance of Jesus's students following him first and foremost as their teacher
- ▶ How we can re-envision our students not with a watered-down gospel but with the cost of discipleship

12:00 – 1:00

Buffet Lunch — Regency Foyer

1:00 – 2:15

SESSION 3 — RE-CHARTING OUR STUDENTS' PATHWAY TO SPIRITUAL MATURITY — THE UPWARD/DOWNWARD JOURNEY

OVERVIEW: This session presents a discipleship of hope paradigm described in Gary David Stratton's book *The Jesus Climb: Journeying from Student to Disciple*. Healthy faith is impossible without our helping students develop a "hope that does not disappoint" formed through the interplay of their "upward" climb through suffering and surrender and their "downward" journey of experiencing "God's love poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Romans 5:3-5). Let's explore the disciple's . . .

- ▶ *Ascent* of a higher commitment to loving God and neighbor with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength
- ▶ *Descent* into a deeper experience of the intimate, transforming, and other-centered love of God
- ▶ Belief in and knowledge of Jesus as their Teacher, Messiah, Son of God, and Redeemer of the world

2:15 – 3:00

Refreshment Break — Regency Foyer

3:00 – 4:15

SESSION 4 — REFOCUSING OUR SCHOOL'S DISCIPLESHIP EFFORTS – IN ACADEMICS, STUDENT LIFE, MENTORING, SERVICE LEARNING, ETC.

OVERVIEW: Explore lessons learned (and failed) in Johnson University's multifaceted pursuit of becoming a "Great Commission University" capable of graduating disciples who have become the kind of people who teach everything Jesus lived and live everything Jesus taught. Consider a refocusing discipleship in . . .

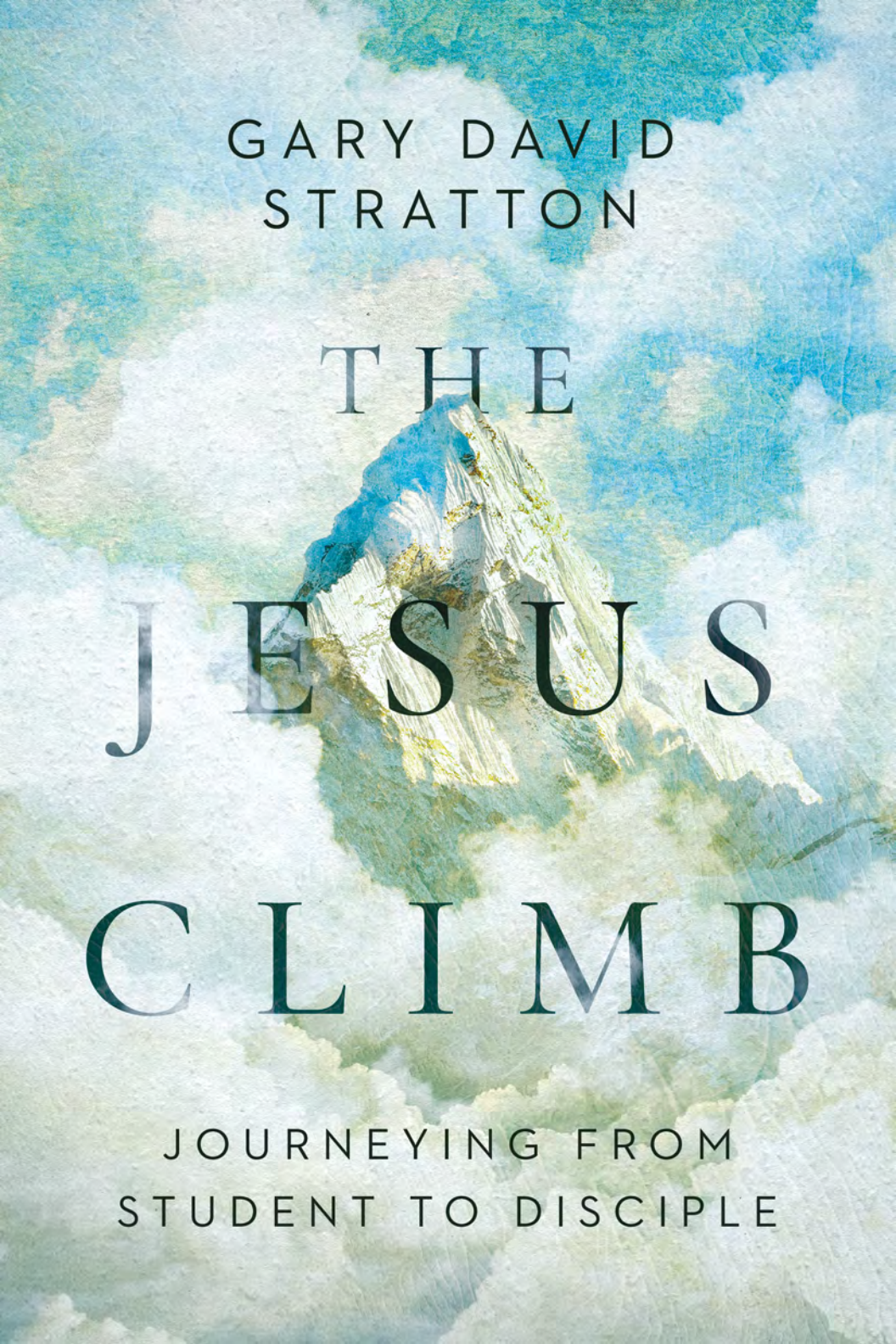
- ▶ The Classroom
- ▶ Student life
- ▶ Athletics
- ▶ Service-learning
- ▶ Chapel

4:15 – 4:30

Wrap Up

6:00 – 8:30

CONNECTIONS DINNER — Ballroom B/C/D



GARY DAVID
STRATTON

THE
JESUS
CLIMB

JOURNEYING FROM
STUDENT TO DISCIPLE

JESUS GENERATIONS

GENERATION	<i>Who</i> is Jesus?	<i>Why</i> would someone want to follow Jesus?	<i>How</i> does someone follow Jesus?
Your Grandparents			
Your Parents (Pastor)			
Your Friends			

George Mallory's Planned 1924 Expedition Camps



Expedition Camps on the Journey from Student to Disciple



The Greatest Commandment

MATTHEW 22:37-40

(John 13:34)

Death Zone

26,250 feet

“Love
the Lord
your God with
all your heart
and with all your
soul and with all
your mind.”

This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments... A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”

The Highest Mountain

MOUNT EVEREST

(29,031.69 FT./8,848.86 M) NEPAL

THE JESUS CLIMB

Journeying from Student to **DISCIPLE**

Dis-ci-ple (di-si'-pehl) n. A student who *continues* on the upward/downward journey of following Jesus, his teachings, and his way of life—the *ascent* of a higher and higher commitment to loving God and neighbor with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength, and the *descent* into a deeper and deeper experience of the intimate, transforming, and other-centered love of God—because they *believe* and have come to *know* him as Teacher, Messiah, Son of God, and Redeemer of the world.

The disciple's *ascent* into a higher and higher commitment to loving God and neighbor with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength.

DESIRE

Follow Jesus as Your Teacher

John 1:36-38 When [John the Baptist] saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" When the two *disciples* heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?"¹²

INSTRUCTION

Reorient Your Life around Jesus's Teachings

John 8:30-32 As he spoke, many believed in him. To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my *disciples*. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

SURRENDER

Exchange Your Lesser Desires for God's Kingdom

Mark 8:34-35 Whoever wants to be my *disciple* must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.

COMMUNITY

Make Your Faith Your Own . . . Together!

John 6:66-69 From this time many of his *disciples* turned back and no longer followed him. "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God."

The disciple's *descent* into a deeper and deeper experience of the intimate, transforming, and other-centered love of God.

INTIMACY

Pursue the Love and Life of God

John 14:21 Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.

PRAYER

Bear the Fruit of the Kingdom

John 15:7-8 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my *disciples*.

LOVE

Give Away Your Life in Other-Centered Service

John 13:34-35 A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my *disciples*, if you love one another.

EMBODIMENT

Live Everything Jesus Taught—Teach Everything Jesus Lived

Matthew 28:17-21 When they saw [Jesus], they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore *go* and *make disciples* of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.



Two Stream Paradigm

PRESENCE

Outpouring

“New Lights”

Pro-Revival

Enthusiasm

Hyper-Spirituality
Anti-Intellectual

“Old Lights”

Anti-Revival

Moralism

Hyper Rationalism
Anti-Supernatural

Trinity

Transformationalism
Moderate Revivalism

POWER

Experience

PURITY

Worldview

Joel 2:28-30

Ezekiel 39:29, 36:25-27

Act One



HERO

1. Hook
2. Inciting Event
3. Rubicon



MENTOR

25%

STORY STRUCTURE 101

External Journey



PLOT

CONFLICT

5. MidPoint
(Rising Tension) (All In)
4. New Desire
6. All is Lost

Internal Journey

TRANSFORMATION ARC

Worldview Mentoring

MORAL PREMISE

Act Two

Act Three



GOAL

Worldview
Impact

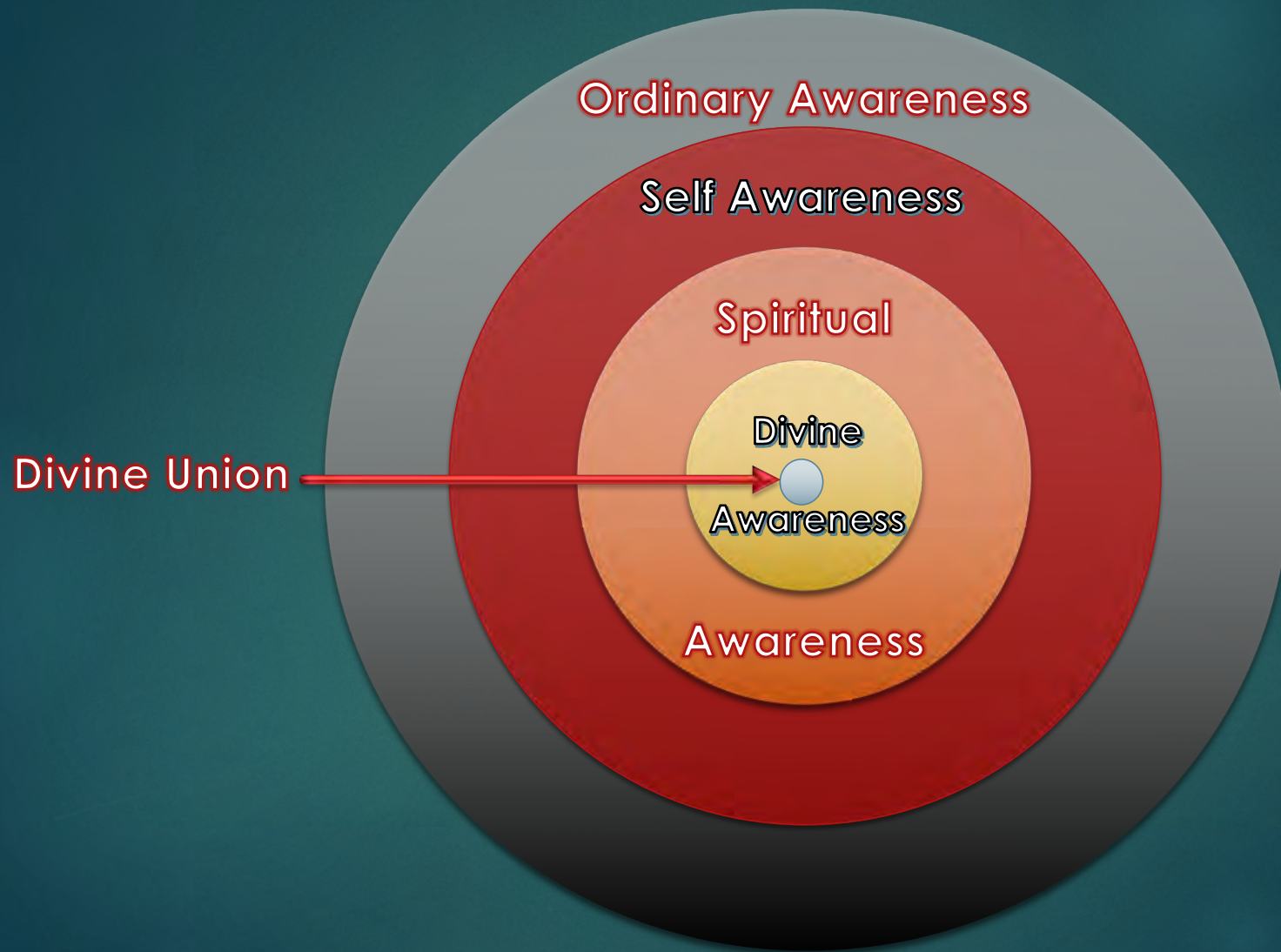
- 9/12. Resolution
- 8/11. Crux
- 7/10. Final Battle

Worldview
Transformation

Worldview
Statement

Cycles of Faith Development

- 1. The Pond Love of Self for Self's Sake Reward-Based**
Lemuel with son – Preconventional Morality – David with Bathsheba –
"Keep these commands and all will go well with you." – Deut 4:40
"My son, keep my words and store up my commands ... and you will live." –Proverbs 7:1-2
Fasting, Journaling
- 2. The Stream Love of God for Other's Sake Peer-Based**
Ruth with Naomi – Constructive Social Hedonism – Jacob & Family
"Join together in following my example. Track with those you see running this same course, headed for this same goal." -Phil 3:17
"Spur one another to love & good deeds. Don't give up the habit of gathering together to encourage one another. -Heb. 10:24-25
Mentoring, Small groups
- 3. The Lake Love of God for Self's Sake Rule-Based**
Daniel in Babylon – Conventional Morality – Jonah & Nineveh
"The faith that you have, have as your own conviction before God." – Rom. 14:22
"Whoever loves father, mother more than me, is not worthy of me." –Matt. 10:37
Praise, Scripture Meditation, Intercession
- 4. The River Love of God for God's Sake Mystery-Based**
Job - Deconstructive Individual Asceticism – Job's Friends
"My ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you..." –Job 42:5
"We know and rely upon the love God has for us. God is love.... Perfect love drives out fear..." -1Jn 4:16-18
Lament, Centering Prayer, Liturgy
- 5. The Ocean Love of Others for God's Sake Principle-Based**
Peter with Cornelius – Post-Conventional - "You have heard it said, but I say unto you." Hidden Service, Social Justice
"We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God but hates others is a liar." - 1Jn 4:19-21
"Now, I know God doesn't show favoritism but accepts from every tribe the one who fears him and does what is right." Act 10:34-35



FOSTERING AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY

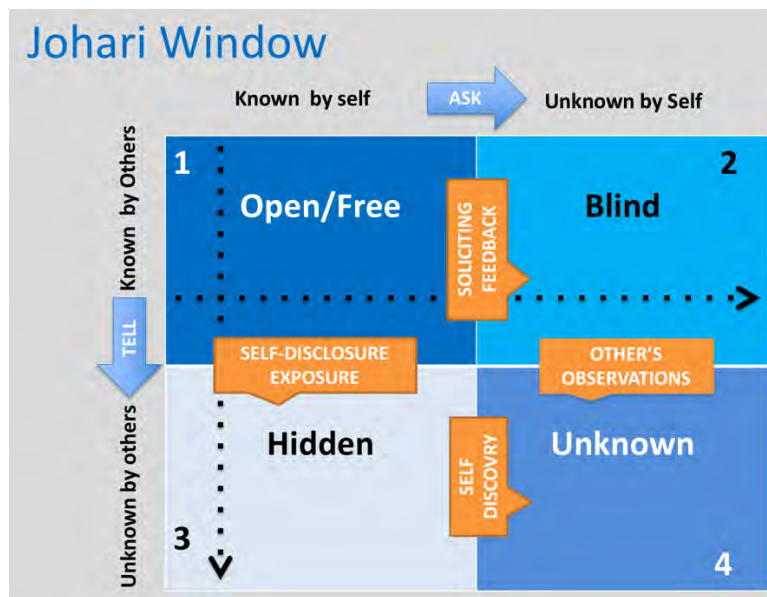
Gary & Sue Stratton

“We cultivate love when we allow our most vulnerable and powerful selves to be deeply seen and known, and when we honor the spiritual connection that grows from that offering with trust, respect, kindness and affection.”

— Brené Brown

Our Human Hunger for Genuine Relationships

- The Power of Genuine Friendships
- Danger of Pseudo Relationships



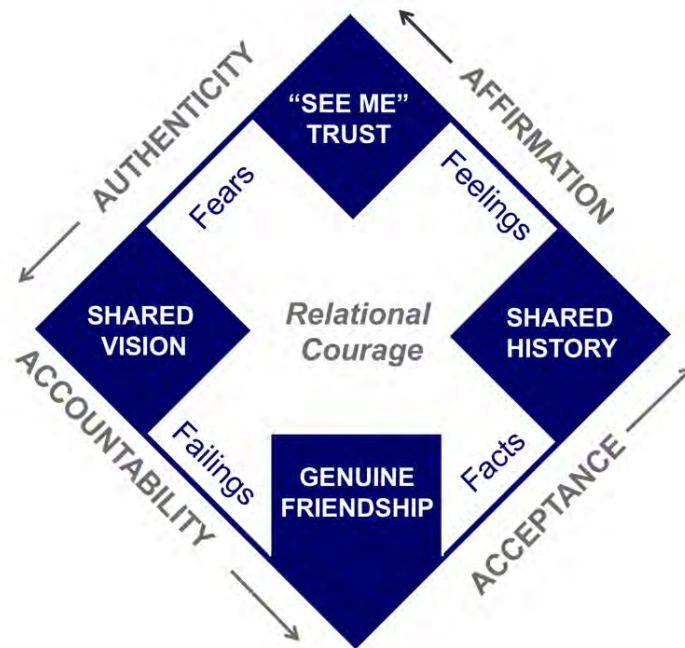
Becoming

- 1) **Open/Free**: Known by Self and Others
- 2) **Blind**: Known by Others, but Unknown by Self
- 3) **Hidden**: Known by Self, but Unknown by Others
- 4) **Unknown**: Unknown by Self and Others

Relationships and Self-Awareness

- **Tell**: Self-Disclosure
- **Ask**: Self-Discovery

The Pathway to Genuine Community → *Balancing Vulnerability and Safety*



1) Shared History

- Facts/Events
- Acceptance
- Barriers
- Strategies: Appeal to Sharing

2) "See Me" Trust

- Feelings/Opinions
- Affirmation
- Barriers
- Strategies

3) Shared Vision

- *Fears/Desires*
- *Authenticity*
- Barriers
- Strategies

4) Genuine Friendship

- *Failings/Goals*
- *Accountability*
- Barriers
- Strategies

Five Friendship Killers

- 1) _____ame
- 2) _____ame
- 3) _____ame
- 4) _____aim
- 5) _____aim

Three Friendship Builders

Stop
Look
Listen

Personal Habits & Credos

Ducking out or Jumping in
Amping Up or Putting Down
Shrinking back or Pushing forward
Speak the truth in love