

Reclaiming Vocation: A Conversation with Keith Anderson

[0:00] W: I'm delighted today to be sitting with you, Keith, an inspiration and a friend, faculty associate for spirituality and vocation, and one who shares a history and a heart for Vantage Point 3 Ministries. Keith is also our host, right, of At the Blog, or no, At the Table on the Mentoring Way of Life platform. And Keith is also the author of approximately nine books, but the one we're going to be diving into today, that I absolutely love, is his latest published work of art called *On Holy Ground*.

This is it. *Finding Your Story of Identity, Belonging, and Sacred Purpose*.

And for those of us listening, my name is Wendy Delcourt. I am a board member for VantagePoint3 Ministries for almost five years. And I've been a facilitator and an advocate for their pathway processes for almost 20. And it has been absolutely transformational. And it all happened just like this, Keith. I was invited to the table from an elder spiritual director to explore three questions. Who am I? Who is God? And what might God be up to in my life? It was a pivotal time because I was very curious about those questions around purpose and vocation and calling, which is why I get to hang out with you today and discuss this incredible life work that you do, Keith. So welcome. I'm so happy to be with you today.

[1:24] K: Thank you. And Wendy, let me just say what a complete honor this is to sit at the table with you, even though we're doing it virtually. You are someone, and I hope that everyone who is listening in will understand how much I and VantagePoint3 hold you in such high regard for your wise leadership, your creativity. And I think especially for your passionate faith, which is evident to all of us who know you. And I'm glad we get to talk about this book, too, because you've been part of the writing of the book in some ways, along with some others in the past. You knew about this book before there was a full title or a cover and all of that. And I think the book is better because you were a part of it.

[02:15] W: Oh, thank you, Keith. Thank you. Your book title says that you're finding your story. What parts of your story, Keith, mostly shape the person that I am with today?

[2:29] K: Good question. Very good question. I think the title of the book is a bit of a clue to my story and how it shaped me, because I would say that the holiest moments of my story were never in the spotlight, but they were always in the margins, in places where I came to know later, almost, that God was forming me on holy ground and what I would call everyday holy ground. I was really never chasing a career. I was following something more like a whisper, I think.

I quote a line from a Wendell Berry novel that feels a bit like my story. The character says, I love this line, he said, "*The future was coming to me, but I had not so much as lifted a foot to go to it.*" I can't say that back then at that point that I even know how to pray, but I knew that I was in on a conversation that mattered and that had started someplace, not with me.

(3:33) And that becomes crucial to my understanding and what I'm trying to write in the book. I had been accepted into a PhD program at the University of Minnesota, and that's where I was headed. I thought it was moving in that direction. But providentially, at the same time, I began to volunteer in a little inner city church, almost literally in the shadow of the state capitol in St. Paul, Minnesota. And what was so important about that is that that was where I began to see life on the edges.

This was truly a powerful shaping influence in my story. I could see kids walking the streets. We started a drop-in center on Friday nights, and I would see kids walking the streets, 10-year-olds, eight-year-olds, at one and two in the morning, because their parents were on the streets, on Rice Street, at the taverns, drinking up their week's wages. But I began to see the world with different eyes, because I was exposed to that world. And you can't unsee poverty once it begins to press into your experience.

(4:49) Well, that took me to enroll, not in the U, but in seminary. And from there, parish ministry, to inner city ministry, and finally, finally to a graduate school presidency in Seattle. That's the point I want to make. Sacred purpose is often given in the margins, because we come to see the world as God sees it.

(5:17) Another story, that is, I still laugh when I think about where it took place. I was at Randy Reese's house. We were in his coat closet, because I was preparing to go out and face the South Dakota, bitterly cold winter. But Randy Reese, who became the founder of VantagePoint3, had been a good friend of mine up until then. And that was until his tragic death just a few years ago. But I'll never forget the conversation. We talked, and we stayed in that closet for some reason. We just kept talking.

There were many other people around distracting us. But we stayed in that closet, and we began to talk. And the question that we asked each other was, How can we form and motivate people to go deep into their faith? Well, we finally got so inspired by that set of questions that we co-wrote a book called *Spiritual Mentoring, A Guide to Giving and Receiving Direction*.

[06:19] W Beautiful book. I have that book.

[6:22] K What came of that for me is that I had a front row seat in the early years prior to the creation of VantagePoint3. Randy and I had found common ground in exploring how do we do this work? How do we invest in preparing great mentors, great leaders, great followers, great peers in each of our settings? I was in a college setting with faculty mostly and staff, and Randy was in a doctoral program.

I want to say my love for VantagePoint3 continues to this day because it continues with the same heart that God gave to Randy back in the very beginning. I don't say this very often. This is truly an anointed mission.

All those years ago, he and I wrestled with, even in the writing, we wrestled with the voice or the tone of our book. How do we make this material accessible to everyone that we want to be able to read it, everyday folks?

We could make it sound very scholarly, and he was in a PhD program, I was in a college. We could make it sound very academic, but instead we wanted to turn it back to people in the pews, the people in our workplaces, the people across the tables from us in all of our various tables. We began to focus on this single motion, and from here it began to move forward.

And it is the idea, the definition that we gave was that **spirituality, going deep with God, is learning to pay attention to the presence of God in everything**. It was less about climbing ladders, as some might say, and more about kneeling low. We came to understand, and this is also very important, we came to understand that **faith grows in conversations**.

[08:32] W: Absolutely.

[08:33] K: Utterly simplistic. Faith grows when we talk to each other, when we're asked good questions, in places, often, that no one would have thought secret.

But places that I have come to know and call as altars in the world. The writing of this book started in those early years when I came across a word in Latin called **vocare**. We translate that in English as vocation, but **it means these words. To call.Okay. To summon, to evoke, to give voice, to pay attention to the movements in your story.**

[09:18] W: Wow. Keith, it's just so evident, the common language and heart that you and Randy shared. I can only imagine how much you miss your friend. I know I miss him, and I didn't have a lot of time in a coat closet with him. I really miss him. But from reading your book on sacred ground, I have learned who some of your other teachers were along the path that impacted you significantly spiritually. Would you share today a little bit about some of those people? I believe in your book, you refer to them as markers or guides.

[09:52] K: I want to begin with a story about an epic quote from Annie Dillard, one of America's greatest, greatest writers, novelist, essayist. They literally took my breath away, and they still do. Her words still burn in my heart and my soul. She said, *"You were made and set here for this to give voice to your own astonishment."* *"You were made and set here for this to give voice to your own astonishment."*

Abraham Heschel was a courageous Jewish rabbi in Poland during the early years of Nazi Germany. And He wrote even then, in the terror of that context, he wrote about spirituality, and he said, we are called to live in *radical amazement*, his words. And I found that to be the truest posture of the soul.

(10:50) W: I love that.

(10:51) K: I would say in his writings, Heschel taught me to let wonder reshape my soul. To be spiritual, he said, is to be amazed. It's also been said that all good theology begins in wonder. I want to live that way.

[11:13] W: Me too.

[11:15] K: Three professors along the way, and then, interestingly, a maintenance man at Deluxe Tech Printers, where I worked part-time when I was in seminary. His name is Chuck Johnson. He and I would meet back at the dumpster on the dock at Deluxe Tech Printers, and he became my spiritual companion. Other guys in the shop would call me, come in, and they'd say, well, preacher boy, what'd you learn today? 30 seconds to give an answer. Chuck met me at the dumpster, and he would ask me questions like this one. "What do you think God is saying into your life right now?"

(12:00) So, try this. Draw a circle, put your initials in the center of the circle, and then begin to draw spokes, lines out to people who have come alongside you. Maybe formally, maybe casually, maybe in their writings. People who have stood by you, and what someone called the bits and pieces of everyday life.

You will discover, as you do that little exercise, that there's this whole constellation of spiritual voices of friends. Friends, a few, many for some of us, sometimes only one. What is important to understand is that these are not random occurrences. I'm absolutely convinced that God brings people to join you on your journey. Maybe like Jesus joining those two on Emmaus Road. Yes. Hard questions. He poked them hard with some of his thoughts and wanted them to go back into scripture. But I say to you, stay alert. See who surprises you with the conversation along the way or an unexpected phone call.

Constellation is one of those signposts of God's presence on the journey, on the road.

[13:25] W: Keith. So like, why, why this book—and why now?

[13:31] K: Because we've made vocation too small. Vocation is not only what you do, it's about who you are with God in every moment and every square inch of life.

To put it even more directly. I believe we have lost the plot. On vocation. We've made it into something that was never intended to be in the first place.

We live in a time of great disorientation, right? Politically, socially, culturally, individually, people are disoriented. We are grasping for meaning in a noisy divided. And just so. So often such an angry world.

On Holy Ground, is my attempt to offer, I hope a gentle but also a bold invitation for us to reclaim something. I want to reclaim vocation as a lifelong companionship with our Abba Father. It's a relationship that redefines how we live, how we love, how we listen. How we lead. How we use alliteration in a sentence like that. That was supposed to be fun.

W: Oh.

K: When we know ourselves. As the radically beloved of God. No longer on that same frantic search for our worth. Or our brand or our identity. Instead we are living from that identity.

[15:08] And here's this. At the heart of the book. I want to talk about a symbiotic relationship between. Identity belonging and sacred purpose. These all fit together.

Deep knowing leads us to purpose. Action. Deep knowing leads us. to hospitality instead of hostility. To grace. Instead of the judgment. Deep knowing leads us to courage. Instead of to fear.

[15:40] Most books about vocation tell you to find your passion. You go on a search for something that is almost exclusively about yourself. This book invites you to find your sacred place in God's story. It's not a motivational book in that sense. It's an attempt to be an invitation to transformation. To find your story of identity, belonging, and sacred purpose. All of which has already been given to you. Vocation is nothing less than companionship with Jesus through the Holy Spirit in response to Abba father.

In essence, we can understand and call it Trinitarian.

[16:25] That's beautiful.

[16:28] And this book grew out of a lifetime of walking with other people through seasons of transitions of all kinds. Uncertainty, longing, trauma, faith, sorrow, pain, you name it. And I wanted to write the kind of book that invites conversation very much the same way we do for the blog At the Table. Not a book that wants to preach from a distance or preach at all. It's a book that invites conversation. And I say this in all honesty. Faith just is not my native language. Spirituality, the life of the spirit within, has as much as I know about it. Spirituality has often confused me, puzzled me, and fulfilled me. And God has been, well, God, sometimes more mystery than clarity.

[17:37] W: In your book, though, Keith, you refer to yourself as a, I love this, a wrestler on an expedition. What do you mean by that?

[17:51] K: Well, first of all, I don't mean physical wrestling. I tried that when I was a freshman in high school, when I was 79 pounds and lost every match that I was in.

But the language, language is really kind of Jesus' fault. Think about what he calls himself. All kinds of things he calls himself. One is very clear, it's the word *hodos*, which means way or the way. The image VP3 would use is [The Journey](#). And in this quote that you're referring to, I use the word expedition.

But the sequence here is utterly profound—it's critical. Follow me, he says. Go with me, he says. Go where I go, he says. Go where I send. We're not following our own so-called bliss. We're not following

our own brand. We don't start with ourselves. I said to college students over and over again, the timeline did not and the timeline does not start with you. It starts in the heart of our God. So we follow Jesus, seeking to become like him and to do as he'd said and did. As did merchants.

Farmers, fishermen. Widow. The list goes on. We're not talking about a job. We're talking about spirituality, a way of being in the world in relationship with God.

[19:34] So you asked about me as a wrestler on an expedition. I want to ask who is meant, who else is meant to be a wrestler on the expedition? And I must say, everyone who chooses to follow. Where do they go on this journey or expedition? Wherever Jesus goes, wherever Jesus sends.

Dallas Willard's definition is, it's profound, it's capacious. He said our goal in life is to live our life as Jesus would live it, if he were me or you.

How do we follow as wrestlers? Listen to the list of some of the verbs that Jesus also uses: follow, take up, deny, abide, go, watch, listen, love. Alongside of that, I have said and I will say it again that I wrestle with questions. I wrestle with flaws with, with failure, with sorrow. In other words, with all of my humanity.

W: Yeah, absolutely.

[20:48] K: In other words, we learned to follow the way. To wrestle.... To wrestle is to, to live honestly before God, to bring it all doubts, sorrows, and pain to God for one reason, because God is already there ahead of us. Alongside of us, or we're alongside of God. God is already there waiting.

Sharon de la Sparks is a wonderful friend in a beautiful, powerful book called *Big Questions Worthy Dreams*. I think that's another way of talking about being a wrestler on an expedition.

[21:36] I want to make this claim and I do make the claim in the book, it's okay to bring your questions to ABBA. It's okay to bring your doubts, your angers, your fears, your heartbreak. If you don't believe me, then take the Bible, let it fall open to the middle. Go back to Psalm chapter one, and start there, but then keep reading all the way through to Psalm 150. Many of the Psalms are Psalms of orientation; life is coherent, it all fits. I love you, God. I praise you because you have been good to me. But if you read carefully, there are, at least some people say, more than a third of the Psalms are Psalms of disorientation. Where life doesn't make sense, life is not coherent, where I'm not sure what I believe, I'm not sure where I'm going, I'm not sure what's next. So I'm wrestling.

[22:40] If the Psalms don't convince you. Listen to the disciples. Jesus, why do you teach in parables that so many people don't understand?

W: Yeah.

K: And, including us. I think that's what they really were saying. Or after the resurrection, after the resurrection, Jesus has come back from death—all of the things he talked about. After all of that, they say to him, Is this the time you're going to inaugurate your kingdom? This is the clearest, most profound evidence that they simply didn't yet understand.

[23:26] W: One of the themes that I've read in your book is that there are, which I love this, there's seasons for vocation, to our vocations. Can you tell us what you mean more about that, Keith?

[23:41] K: Yeah. We seem to believe that vocation only belongs to the young, that it's only for career choices, maybe at age 21.

[23:51] 91-year-old Wendell Berry is my all-time absolute favorite writer.

W: Yes.

K: He writes novels, poetry, essays. One of his best poems is short, so I can quote it. 91 years old, he says, *"Well, anyway, I'm not gonna die young."*

[24:18] The sad thing is, many of us do die young. Even if we grow old, we seem to stop living. Stop growing. We seem to lose our curiosity, our amazement, astonishment, or wonder.

If your calling is only to a job. You see what happens when you no longer have a job. You've lost your identity. You've lost your worth. And sadly, so many believe they have lost their value. The tragedy is not growing old; the tragedy is growing stagnant.

[24:58] As a pastor, Eugene would take his five or six-year-old daughter Karen to a nursing home. In this particular story, they met with an older woman who had dementia. So she would repeat her story over and over and over again. And that particular day, she had told the same stories five or six times. Getting a little bit worried about how bored Karen might be. And so he used pastoral language. He said to this woman, 'Let me pray for you, or let's sing a hymn together,' which really was code that I've got to get Karen out to the car and find out if she's doing okay.

He told Karen. I'm so proud of you for the way you listened to this elderly woman, the way you honored her. Karen was insightful, just a wonderful child to listen to. She said, "Oh, Daddy, I knew what she was doing. She was telling me who she is."

That story is precisely why I want to reclaim that notion that vocation is a spirituality for all of life. For the young. For the old.

[26:13] W: That's beautiful. What do you think has been missing in how we talk about or discuss calling and vocation today in our context?

K: We've flattened vocation into a job description. Calling is not about securing a paycheck or curating your LinkedIn profile. It's about living God's heart into the world's needs. This book should not belong in a self-help section at the bookstore. Self-help stops with me. God's call moves us to we.

And instead of a richly nuanced spirituality called vocation, vocabulary, or vocatio. We have reduced it to career planning and placement. One-dimensional

W: missing a lot.

K: And it surprises me in some ways that that I have to say this but in the, in the, in the core of the book, I am trying to say, Jesus did not think of himself as a career counselor. Much more cosmic in mind, he called it the kingdom of God, the reign of God kingdom of heaven, to set the world right.

[27:32] W: You say, Keith, in your book, and in many conversations, that we live in the narrative that we choose. First, what do you what do you mean by that, and why does that even matter?

K: It might not surprise you to know that that idea came from Wendell Berry.

W: No.

K: What he said is that we live in a narrative that we choose all of us. We all live in the narrative that we choose. That means that spiritual mentoring is a shared reading of the narrative that is your story. It's the journey. As an attentive, examined, shared exploration of faith, as it is lived in your life.

Keywords: story. It's lived faith, it's community. And this is profound; we become, to a large extent, that to which we pay attention. We are people who care about certain things that either shape us or express our identity.

Here's the point. Jesus came with two epic purposes: to reveal God to us. And then second, ... right, the creation by his life, death, and resurrection. So, when I claim Jesus' story is mine, I am brought into the arc of Jesus' epic purposes. I become part of that. Let me say that again because I think it's one of the most important things that may be said today.

[29:15] W: Okay,

K: When I claim Jesus' story as mine. I am brought into the arc of Jesus' epic purposes. Jesus' narrative becomes mine, it becomes part of me, and I'm brought into the arc of Jesus' epic purposes. When I claim Jesus' story as mine, I'm brought into a future narrative for the sake of the entire universe. And I'm beginning in a role that I will play, we all will play in that unfolding story.

[29:49] W: I love that.

K: When I claim Jesus' story is mine, I am given an identity. I'm someone who is in Christ. I'm someone, even more deeply, who belongs to Jesus.

So, the story that we claim as our own. It turns out isn't about us, after all, it belongs to the community of faith in which we practice our obedience and faithfulness. There's a lot of sacrifice and kindness, truth-telling, compassion. The word we can use here is worldview. It's the way we see the world, the way we understand Jesus' story, the way we understand the story we claim as our own. As we study and follow Jesus' words and ways, they shape everything. What we see, what we value, how we spend time, how we spend money, how we care for others, or how we don't.

[30:57] W: Keith, justice threads its way through your book, like a quiet fire. Why isn't justice, literally, just another social cause?

K: Justice in this context is not political. It's biblical. For me, justice is the public face of God. Scripture will not let us close our ears to this; justice is God's heartbeat. The vocation without justice is not from Jesus because, and I'm going to say it again. Scripture will not let us look away. Justice is not an afterthought to God. From the burning bush to the prophets to the teachings of Jesus were called to love mercy, to do justice, to walk humbly with God. It's not political—it's biblical. Sacred purpose for us—the expression of that includes how we show up in a broken world with compassion and conviction.

[32:03] Justice is not optional. It's not a side project for the so-called woke. It is the heartbeat of God. We stand with the marginalized. We challenge systems that harm. We seek Shalom. The central element in all of the Old Testament and New Testament. That means we walk on holy ground. It means we stand where suffering walks. And, this part is also very important; it means we refuse neutrality. Holy ground is never far from the cries of the oppressed.

You asked about some of the guideposts in my life. Believe it or not, Bono from U2 is one of those. Bono wrote this,

“One thing we can all agree on all faiths or ideologies, is that God is with the vulnerable and poor. God is in the slums and the cardboard boxes were the poor play house. God is in the silence of a mother who has infected her child with a virus that will end both their lives. God is in the cries heard under the rubble of war. God is in the debris of wasted opportunity and lives, and God is with us. If we are with them.”

Bono's words are hard to hear or hard to ignore.

W: Absolutely

K: He also said,

“It's annoying, but [the Irish language] justice and equality are mates, aren't they? Justice always wants to hang out with equality, and equality is a real pain.”

[33:54] Bono understood his role as a musician this way. And I think this is really an important sentence. He said, “I think God gets annoyed with the gifted. We should know that our work is not more important than a plumber or a carpenter.” He said, “I'm a musician, I write songs. I just hope when the day is done that I've been able to tear back a little corner of the darkness.”

W: I love that.

K: Justice, not a side project, it's not an afterthought or an option for the few. It is a lifelong posture of all of us who walk on holy ground. So I say, the church has to learn how to do more than just sing sentimentally about righteousness and justice.

[34:47] W: We sure do. But Keith in this discombobulated, disoriented, fractured world. Like, it's overwhelming. Where do we even begin to live out justice—this justice that you're speaking of?

[35:02] K: How about in our neighborhoods? We begin by standing where pain is. I say, pay attention to the pain near first and then eventually further away.

Pay attention to the pain in your neighborhood, your family, your church, your community, and then eventually, out there to the world. Justice, I'm saying, is woven into scriptures very fabric. We begin by standing where the pain is. Justice can be yes, there's a place for you at the table.

Radical inclusivity, it has been called. Justice can be no. It can mean solidarity with, or even resistance on behalf of, but it is always centered in the phrase, justice for all. It's also centered in compassion, which means to feel with, or even to hurt with.

[36:08] W: Keith, when you wrote this book. Did this first spark, you know, flash come from a flash of wisdom? Did it come from an ache of an old wound? A moment of clarity, or something even deeper?

K: Too much of it was born in the ache of loss. In the death of our niece Katie. It grew out of a season, where grief came very close to us, and the tragic and unexpected death of our precious niece.

It's too long a story to tell, but the quick story is that she had been stalked by a former toxic boyfriend. He followed her car to the hospital, where her mother was, and then to a grocery store next door, because he thought she was in it. She wasn't. She had been escorted by a friend of hers, a young man who was worried about this other boyfriend. He followed the car, thinking she was the driver. In a fit of rage, he pulled a knife. And this other young man was left to die in the parking lot. We didn't know where Katie was for several days.

[37:41] W: I can't imagine.

K: We didn't know if this other guy had her. We didn't know if she was safe. And finally, she called her mother and told her where she was. Then she ended with these haunting words. She said, "*This is all my fault.*" Two days later, Katie died from an overdose of fentanyl.

W: I'm so sorry, Keith.

K: I rediscovered in that just awful tragedy that sacred purpose is not always forged in comfort, but more often, or at least often, in the crucible of loss. Our deepest callings often emerge when life strips us bare and forces us to see what really, really matters after all.

[38:55] I might say what really matters is that your story is a portal to grace. The grace of your identity. You are already loved. You don't need to perform for God to receive God's love. The grace of your belonging. You're already invited to the table.

You already belong. In the grace of purpose, you already have been given a sacred purpose to live already to the glory of God.

So I say again, pay attention. Look around, open your eyes to injustice, oppression, to trauma, to heartbreak. And then maybe even just try this. Find a simple way today to bless just one person. And then do it again tomorrow.

[39:56] In the book, I said, "This is our time, our moment. Our opportunity is a great adventure ahead for those who commit to restore, unify, heal, redeem, reconcile, repair, and rebuild."

[40:13] Wendy wrote, a disruptive, disruptive for me, a sentence in your book, *Shift, Moving Toward God's Perspective*. Something that I find riveting. "*God uses the curriculum,*" and I love all of these, "*the curriculum of pain, beauty, and awe to teach us more about this idea of heaven on earth.*"

[40:43] W: Thank you, Keith. It's true when we live into it, isn't it? And I'm so grateful you shared about Katie. And yeah, I can't imagine that kind of pain.

You have so many stories like this in your book and in your works. So I'm excited to see who's going to hear more of these. But if you, at this point in our time together, had to choose one story from your book that you replay over and over in your mind, which one would it be?

K: That's a hard one.

W: There's so many.

[41:28] K: But the one that I tell, I talk about in my memory, at least, is about Kathy.

I got up to preach on a Sunday morning. It was a communion Sunday. And there was a woman that came in, young woman, four children, sat in the very back row. I could see her off on the left side. Communion was brought to her. [Keith puts his hand up, and says] Her hands up and just took her head. I went to see her that week. She was in an apartment that she said no one had upkeeped for a very long time. I sat in the one adult chair that there was. She sat on a little child's stool.

She was on trial because she had sold cocaine.

W: Oh, boy.

K: Forced to sell cocaine by one of the forefathers of her children. I never thought of a courtroom as holy ground until that trial. I went into the trial. I sat on the other side of the defense table. And the judge saw me when he came in and said, "*Can you identify yourself?*" And then when I did, he said, "*Why don't you come and sit at the table?*"

Time for the judge to make his decision. And I was paying attention, but I was not ready for what I heard. He said, "*Pastor, if you were sitting on this side and held the gavel in your hand. What decision would you make? What should I do with Kathy?*"

[43:20] W: Oh, man.

K: Well,

W: Yeah.

K: As I rose to my feet, I quickly determined that nothing that I had been taught in seminary had prepared me for this kind of moment. What am I supposed to say to a judge?

W: Yeah.

[43:40] K: But, by the time I got all the way to my feet, I had words that were not mine that I understood I was supposed to speak. And I simply said, *"Your honor, I would ask you to call her by name. Her name is Kathy. She's a child of God. She's beloved of God. She has acknowledged that she is guilty of the crime. I would ask you to put her on probation. To require some kind of consequence for this. But I would ask you to send her home, to be with her children, where she can continue to love them and guide them in relationship with the church."*

Gavel came down. And the judge says, *"It is so ordered as the pastor has said."*

[44:41] W: Wow. That's an incredible story. I love that story. So, Keith, why do we as humans keep trying to fit our calling, our opear, or purpose into a resume or a LinkedIn profile? Why do we keep trying to define us like that? What are we doing?

[45:02] K: I think it's safer. I think it feels safer to measure worth by titles, by promotions, by achievement, by applause, by external things. But we misunderstand that our truest identity is received, not achieved. Before you ever earned or impressed, you were already loved.

W: I love that.

[45:32] K: That's the identity from which sacred purpose flows. Dan Allender, my predecessor and my colleague, my brother. The first time I heard him say this... He said, *"You are the only person in the universe who can't see your own face."* The point was, we need others to reflect us back to ourselves. We need others to be the mirror. And so vocation becomes that mirror back to us. As we're shaped by the God who calls us before we do a single thing. Others help us to see as God sees us. They are the mirror to our souls.

W: What a beautiful picture. So when people choose your book, Keith, what do you hope they'll feel in their bones? Like, what do you hope will just grab them?

K: That you're already on the holy ground that you're searching for. God is not waiting for you to get somewhere else before calling you. That you matter now. That your questions, your wounds, your wonder, all of it matters. I would love for anyone who reads the book to experience what a friend wrote to me recently about the book. He said, *"I will linger in this book. I'll let it begin to live in me."* That would be my prayer.

[47:11] W: I'm going to pray that too. We all know, though, Keith, when you put yourself out there, like you have in many ways, every book meets resistance. Who is going to find *On Holy Ground* a very difficult book to receive?

[47:29] K: Those who prefer a safe gospel stripped of justice and honest suffering. Some will simply set it down because it insists, like the Talmud, the word of the rabbi's, that justice is not optional. Some will set it down and resist it because they think that suffering is a detour, not a doorway.

Eugene Peterson said it so plainly, he said, "*We live in the company of both the shadow and the shepherd.*" So our pain, if we let it, becomes our greatest teachers.

W: Absolutely.

K: And then, there are those who believe their story is too late to matter. And to them, to any who may be listening to this, I want to say, God is still writing, your chapter is not over.

[48:37] W: Oh, that is just so encouraging. How do you imagine this book sparking change in churches, small groups, friendships, coffee dates? How is it going to do that?

[48:51] K: The Irish poet, William Butler Yeats, said that education or knowing or we can even say formation, but that, "*Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.*" I want to light a fire. I want people to gather around this book and find themselves telling the truth about their story and hearing the truth from God and stepping into the world with holy courage. I want to see mentoring tables multiply, conversations deepen, and lives open to sacred purpose. It's already ours, yours, theirs. Conversations can become holy ground. Faith is lived experience.

Remember this: the Bible is not a fax from God. It's an invitation to move into the places where God lives, including in us. Jesus is very clear in John. We are image bearers to God, and God lives in us. And that means that God lives in our stories. Why do we read the stories of Abraham and Jacob, Sarah, Mary, Mary Magdalene, Philip, take your why do we read those stories? Because they give us a glimpse into how God works in their lives in a way that I can begin to pay attention to where God is working in my life as well.

And our blog is one of the places where we try to put feet to those kinds of ideas. So if, *On Holy Ground*, stirs any kind of interest at all in how to live in this particular way or how to step into the story of Jesus' gospel, perhaps you'll find your way to the book.

[50:58] W: Keith, what's next for you? And for this conversation.

[51:05] K: We're not finished talking about this; this is only the beginning. The book is now available through WIPF and Stock, W-I-P-F and Stock Publishe, but maybe more readily available to most people through Amazon.

And for those who subscribe to **At the Table with Keith Anderson**, we're giving away a set of steak knives. No. We're giving away discussion questions for groups.

W: Yes.

K: But in the months ahead, we're going to have more online conversations, some spaces where people can ask their own questions—wrestle a bit.

W: Absolutely.

[51:54] W: But, Keith, I thank you. I thank you so much for sharing your time and your gifts and your life's work with us today. I have enjoyed it so much. God's images got such a beautiful, enduring quality through the things that you say and do. It's so evident that he's at work in your life in powerful ways. And I'm so blessed to be a part of that.

I encourage anyone who's listening to us today, if they found us kind of cool to hang out with or this conversation in any way, get your copy of this amazing book, *On Holy Ground*. And I am encouraging them also to subscribe to [our blog] *At the Table*, on our vantagepoint3.org website. But also to stay tuned because there's so many cool events coming in the future, some book discussions and some really, really neat ways to connect meaningfully and deeper in community in the winter and in the early spring.

So I'm hoping, Keith, to grow our table. And any final word from you, my friend?

[53:01] K: Go to amentoringway.org. Scroll down to the blog, *At the Table*. And the reason is that we've gathered a lovely community of people who are subscribers and others who just log in. We'd love to have you join that growing community. It's been it's just been such an honor to be able to write weekly and talk about some of these things that we're talking about.

So we're not really going to send you any kitchen knives, but we will send you questions for a group conversation about *On Holy Ground*, if that's of interest to you.

And last of all, let me say—Wendy, you did good.

W: Thank you, Keith, and until next time, bless you.

<https://amentoringway.org/be-encouraged/>

Quotes made by Keith throughout the conversation:

Dallas Willard, "Spirituality Made Hard." <https://dwillard.org/articles/spirituality-made-hard>. Interview 129
"Our goal in life is to live our life as Jesus would live it if he were me or you."

Bono, US National Prayer Breakfast, 2006.

<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/bononationalprayerbreakfast.htm>

Annie Dillard, *The Writing Life*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1989. One page 52 of *On Holy Ground*, "You were made and set here for this, to give voice to your own astonishment."

Wendy Delcourt, *Shift: Moving Toward God's Perspective*, Sisters, OR: Deep River, 2021. OHG page 30, "God uses the curriculum of pain, beauty, and awe to teach us more about this idea of heaven on earth."

Nigro, Nicholas, ed., *The Spirituality of Bono*, vii, Milwaukee: Backbeat, 2014. OHG page 62, "I'm a musician. I write songs. I just hope when the day is done, I've been able to tear a little corner off the darkness."

Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism*(New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1955), 45–48 (section "Two Kinds of Wonder"). "*We are called to live in radical amazement.*"

Wendell Berry, *Seventy Years*, published in *Given*, p. 25, "*Well, anyhow, I'm not gonna die young.*"

Keith Anderson, *On Holy Ground*, Cascade Books (Wipf and Stock Publishers), 2025, pp xviii-xix, "*This is our time, our moment. Our opportunity is a great adventure ahead for those who commit to restore, unify, heal, redeem, reconcile, repair, and rebuild.*"

"Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire." Attributed to Yeats in an intro to Plutarch, *Moralia*: "On Listening to Lectures" (De auditu), section 48C