

A beginner's guide to Vintage Sessions

by Karen Wright Marsh, author of *Vintage Saints and Sinners: 25 Christians Who Transformed My Faith* (InterVarsity Press, 2017)

These 25 primary text readings come out of nearly twenty years of discussions with undergraduate students at the University of Virginia. As the executive director of Theological Horizons (www.theologicalhorizons.org), I host a weekly lunch called “Vintage”.

We always begin with a life. With the story of a real person who met God, who was met by God in her or his own time and place. Across the centuries, the continents, the cultures, and in spite of our vast differences, this “Vintage Christian” speaks directly into our own experience today—often with a startling freshness.

Then we ask: what can we learn from this older brother or sister in faith? Can we encounter this person as a thoughtful, even wise, mentor? How is her life like mine? How is it different? What might I learn from him about the spiritual life? Where do I see things differently, even disagree?

Before you meet

Each **Vintage Session** is a collection of primary texts: the actual words of a figure profiled in the complementary chapter in *Vintage Saints and Sinners*. I suggest that you start by reading that chapter of *Vintage Saints and Sinners* before you meet---to dip into the brief biographical narrative as a quick way to “meet” the person whose words you’ll be reading. If you don’t have the book, no worries. Do some exploring online or look to your bookshelves. Or skip the prep and just show up when your small group meets.

When you meet

Each Vintage Session reading is found as a printable pdf handout (found for free at karenwrightmarsh.com/vintage-sessions/). One sheet of paper, front and back. That’s all anyone needs to participate—no background in Christianity or the Bible is necessary! At our Vintage Lunches in Charlottesville, people literally walk in from the street (on the promise of a free lunch) and sit down with the reading as we begin.

The leader offers a super brief introduction (5 minutes?) to the Vintage sinner-saint, a bit of biographical back story. Then you jump in together...

The leader reads the text of the handout out loud, pausing along the way to ask questions of the group.

The invitation is to “read from the heart” (as Richard Foster says) and to deeply hear the words of an older brother or sister in the faith. And then to reflect together on what you hear—and explore what it might mean to you.

Touch stones for conversation

1. **Silence is good.** Take time to wonder, to ponder, to puzzle. Savor the words, especially the strange or new ideas. You don't have to say anything at all. If the group sits quietly, well, enjoy those moments.
2. **Your group doesn't have to answer all the questions** in the leader's guide. My prompts are there simply to spark a conversation. Go wherever the Spirit—or your interests—lead you.
3. **There are no right or wrong answers.** And I meant that. Many of the leader's questions will be personal. Respond as and if you like. Listen to others without fixing or correcting. This talk of God and of life is messy business. Always be kind.
4. **You don't have to agree with the Vintage sinner-saint.** This is not a Bible study, where the Scripture asks for special reverence. Be willing to question or challenge the Vintage sinner-saint, just as you would a family member or friend, when you have a different idea. Questions make the conversation so much more interesting!
5. **Whenever you can, put yourself in the place of the Vintage sinner-saint.** Turn to wonder. How does she see God? How does he experience the world around him? How does she see herself? How is he just like you? How is her life, even down to the daily details of time and place, different from yours? Where do you see God acting, saving, transforming, guiding that Vintage sinner-saint? How does this allow you to see your own life in a new way?

If you ever get stuck—or have some great revelation or suggestion—get in touch with me!
at karen@theologicalhorizons.org.

And one more thing...Have fun together!

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Karen Wright Marsh