

Formed in Christ: A Study of the Practices of Following Jesus

Week 1: Introduction to Spiritual Formation¹

INTRODUCTION

1. The PROBLEM(s) of Spiritual Formation

a. Personal Problems

b. Theological Problems

23 *These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.*” (Col 2:23)

8 *“This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; 9 in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”* (Matt 15:8-9).

“The result is that we have multitudes of professing Christians who well may be ready to die but obviously are not ready to live, and can hardly get along with themselves, much less with others” (Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission*).

2. The PROCESS of Spiritual Formation

a. CREATION: We are created in the image of God with rightly ordered desires for Him, one another and the world (Gen 1:26-28).

i. We are fundamentally *desiring* creatures rather than *rational* creatures.

“We are, ultimately, *liturgical animals* because we are fundamentally desiring creatures. We are what we love, and our love is shaped, primed, and aimed by liturgical practices that take hold of our gut and aim our heart to certain ends” (James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 40).

23 *Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.*” (Prov 4:23)

43 *“For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, 44 for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. 45 The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.”* (Luke 6:43-45).

ii. The satisfaction of our desire is found in God.

“Man is a hungry being. But he is hungry for God. Behind all the hunger of our life is God. All desire is finally a desire for Him” (Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 14).

“Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you” (Augustine).

iii. Desires are not inherently bad.

iv. There is a constant competition occurring for our love.

b. FALL: Sin has marred the image of God in us and now our desires are disordered and misdirected (Rom 1).

¹ Works consulted: Willard, *The Great Omission*; Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*; Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*; Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*; Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*.

"22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. 24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen." (Rom 1:22-25)

c. REDEMPTION: In union with Jesus, he restores the image of God in us and reorders our desires for God, one another and the world.

i. We are united to Christ by the Holy Spirit (Rom 6).

"First, we must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us. Therefore, to share with us what he has received from the Father, he had to become ours and to dwell within us" (Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.1.1).

"5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. 6 We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin." (Rom 6:5-6)

"17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." (2 Cor 5:17)

ii. Jesus restores the image of God in us.

"18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." (2 Cor 3:18).

"9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator." (Col 3:9-10).

"19 my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!" (Gal 4:19)

iii. The difference between justification and sanctification

JUSTIFICATION	SANCTIFICATION
One-time act of God's free grace	Ongoing work of God's free grace
God imputes righteousness (legal)	God infuses righteousness (transformational)
Sin is pardoned	Sin is subdued
God alone works	God and we work
Perfectly complete immediately	Progressive work

Westminster Shorter Catechism #35

Q. 35: What is sanctification?

A. Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.

"12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." (Phil 2:12-13).

"Grace is opposed to earning, not to effort" (Willard).

3. The PRACTICES of Spiritual Formation

a. The Necessity of Spiritual Practices

i. Spiritual practices are more than the acquisition of new information.

ii. Spiritual practices engage the whole person (including our bodies).

*“1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your **bodies** as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” (Rom 12:1)*

*“So glorify God in your **body**” (1 Cor 6:20)*

iii. Spiritual practices must be intentional.

“24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. 25 Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. 26 So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. 27 But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.” (1 Cor 9:24-27)

iv. Spiritual practices shape and redirect our loves.

b. What are Spiritual Practices?

Putting off old self and putting on the new: *“5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you...” “12 Put on then...” (Col 3)*

*“The Spiritual Disciplines are those personal and corporate disciplines that promote spiritual growth. They are the habits of devotion and experiential Christianity that have been practiced by the people of God since biblical times” (Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 17).*

*“Spiritual formation is the process through which those who love and trust Jesus Christ effectively take on his character. When this process is what it should be, they increasingly live their lives as he would if he were in their place” (Willard, *The Great Omission*).*

*“Spiritual disciplines are ways we give our bodies to unhurried rhythms of grace” (Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 20).*

c. The Purposes of Spiritual Practices

i. Learning from and obeying all that Jesus commanded

“29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (Matt 11:29)

“19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matt 28:19-20)

ii. Worshiping God

“Disciplines are intentional ways we open space in our lives for the worship of God” (Calhoun 20).

“Worship is every discipline’s end game” (Calhoun 20).

iii. Growing in godliness

“Rather train yourself for godliness;” (1 Tim 4:7)

"18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen." (2 Pet 3:18)

iv. Training for life & mission in the Kingdom of God

"Discipleship is a life of learning from Jesus Christ how to live in the Kingdom of God now, as he himself did" (Willard).

"The goal of the Christian life is not so much a set of behaviors as it is an orientation of the soul toward God and his kingdom" (Calhoun 256).

v. Joyfully loving God and loving people

"30 And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' 31 The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:30-31)

4. The PROMISE of Spiritual Formation

a. God promises that He is at work in you transforming you by His Spirit.

"18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." (2 Cor 3:18)

b. God promises to produce fruit in your life because you are connected to Jesus.

"5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:4)

c. God promises that the power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in you.

"19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might 20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places," (Eph 1:19-20)

d. God promises that He will complete the work that He has begun in you.

"6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." (Phil 1:6)

e. God promises to present you holy and blameless.

"24 Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, 25 to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen." (Jude 1:24-25)

"25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish." (Eph 5:25-27)

f. God promises that you will dwell with Him in perfect, glorified, resurrected bodies in the New Heavens and the New Earth.

Questions for Reflection

- What are your biggest obstacles to growth in Christ?
- What are you longing for in your relationship to God?