

Spiritual Formation

Gracious and loving God, it is with thankfulness that I hear your call to become Christ-like.

Something deep within my heart stirs in its heavy sleep at your call. The memory of something I was to have been, but am not, yet could still be flits on the fringes of my consciousness. O loving God, stir up this hunger in my heart until it becomes the all-consuming passion of my life.

A. Is It In The Bible?

1. Romans 8:29 “For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.” NLT
 - a. Most versions use the word “conformed” (NIV, KJV, ESV)
 - b. Conformed – *summorphos* (Grk)
2. Romans 12:1-2 “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”
 - a. Transformed
 - 1) metamorphoō – metamorphosis
 - 2) Caterpillar/butterfly
 - 3) “This change is so profound that the caterpillar transcends its previous existence to take on a completely different form with a completely different set of capacities.”¹
3. Eph. 4:11-16 “Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. ¹² Their responsibility is to equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. ¹³ This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God’s Son that we will be mature in the Lord, **measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.** ¹⁴ Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won’t be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the

¹ Barton, Ruth Haley. *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives For Spiritual Transformation*. Intervarsity Press. 2009. Kindle loc. 88

truth.¹⁵ Instead, we will speak the truth in love, ***growing in every way more and more like Christ***, who is the head of his body, the church.¹⁶ He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.” NLT (emphasis mine)

4. 2 Cor. 3:18 “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.” ESV
 - a. “St. Paul imagined us ‘like mirrors reflecting the glory of the Lord’ and ‘being transformed into the image that we reflect’ - as we grow in the likeness of Jesus of Nazareth. This is not our work, ‘but the working of the Lord who is the Spirit.’ (2 Cor. 3:18). For the Holy Spirit who formed Jesus of Nazareth is now forming each of us.”²
5. 1 John 3:2 “Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him.” ESV
6. When evangelist Billy Graham’s wife, Ruth, died in 2007, she chose to have engraved on her gravestone words that had nothing to do with her remarkable achievements. It had to do with the fact that as long as we are alive, God will be working on us, and then we will be free. She had been driving one day along a highway through a construction site, and there were miles of detours and cautionary signs and machinery and equipment. She finally came to the last one, and this final sign read, “End of construction. Thank you for your patience.” That’s what is written over Ruth Graham’s grave: “End of construction. Thank you for your patience.”³

B. Spiritual Formation Defined

1. “Spiritual formation is a process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others.”⁴
2. “Once we understand spiritual formation as a process, all of life becomes spiritual formation... Spiritual formation is the experience of being shaped by God toward wholeness.”⁵

² Tetlow, Joseph. *Finding Christ in the World*. The Jesuit conference, Inc. United States. 2017. p. 122

³ Ortberg, John. *Soul Keeping: Caring For The Most Important Part of You*. Zondervan. 2014. p. 151

⁴ Mulholland, Robert. *Invitation to a Journey*. Intervarsity Press. 1993. p.12

⁵ Mulholland, R. p. 16

3. “For many Christians, the quest for the deeper life in Christ is viewed as a discipline for the dedicated disciple, a pursuit for the particularly pious, a spiritual frill for those who have the time or inclination, a spiritual fad for trendy Christians. We fail to realize that the process of spiritual shaping is a primal reality of human existence. *Everyone* is in a process of spiritual formation!”⁶
4. “All of God’s work to conform us to the image of Christ has as its sole purpose that we might become what God created us to be in relationship with God and with others.”⁷

C. The Need

1. “If you want a good litmus test of your spiritual growth, simply examine the nature and quality of your relationships with others. Are you more loving, more compassionate, more patient, more understanding, more caring, more giving, more forgiving than you were a year ago? If you cannot answer these kinds of questions in the affirmative and, especially, if others cannot answer them in the affirmative about you, then you need to examine carefully the nature of your spiritual life and growth.”⁸
 - a. 2 Thess. 1:3 “Dear brothers and sisters, we can’t help but thank God for you, because your faith is flourishing and your love for one another is growing.” NLT
 - b. “If the you of five years ago wouldn't consider the you of today a heretic, then you aren't growing spiritually.” Thomas Merton
2. Matt. 16:26 “And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?” NLT
 - a. “Jesus is talking about a diagnosis, not a destination.”⁹
 - b. “It is not ‘I could end up there.’ It is ‘I could become that.’”¹⁰
 - c. “To lose my soul means I no longer have a healthy center that organizes and guides my life. I am a car without a steering wheel. It doesn’t matter how fast I can go, because I am a crash waiting to happen.”¹¹

⁶ *ibid.* p. 23

⁷ *ibid.* p. 40

⁸ *ibid.* p. 42

⁹ Ortberg, J. p.42

¹⁰ *ibid.* p. 62

¹¹ *ibid.* p.44

D. The Desire

1. Ruth Haley Barton describes it as a “longing for a way of life that works” and “life rhythms that promise something more.”¹²
2. “Choosing a way of life that opens us to the presence of God in the places of our being where our truest desires and deepest longings stir. These discoveries are available to all of us as we become more honest in naming what isn’t working so that we can craft a way of life that is more congruent with our deepest desires.”¹³
3. “When James and John (and later on their mother) answered Jesus’ question about desire by asking that they be granted positions of prominence in Jesus’ kingdom— one on his right and one on his left— it exposed false ambition that was detrimental to them and to the community of disciples. Similarly, there are desires within us that work against the life of the Spirit within us— desires rooted in selfish ambition, pride, lust, fear, self-protection and many other unexamined motives. These desires lurk within all of us, and that is why giving any attention at all to desire feels like opening up Pandora’s box. But it is even riskier to refuse to acknowledge what’s real within us, because whether we acknowledge them or not, these dynamics are at work wielding a subterranean power over us. Their power only gets stronger the longer we repress them. How much safer it is for ourselves and everyone around us if we open up our desires in Jesus’ presence and allow him to help us sift through them.”¹⁴
 - a. “An unexamined life is not worth living.” Plato’s Apology

E. The How

1. The Keeper of the Stream
 - a. There once was a town high in the Alps that straddled the banks of a beautiful stream. The stream was fed by springs that were old as the earth and deep as the sea. The water was clear like crystal . Children laughed and played beside it; swans and geese swam on it. You could see the rocks and the sand and the rainbow trout that swarmed at the bottom of the stream. High in the hills, far beyond anyone’s sight, lived an old man who served as Keeper of the Springs. He had been hired so

¹² Barton, R. loc. 64

¹³ Barton, R. loc. 112

¹⁴ *ibid.* loc. 259

long ago that now no one could remember a time when he wasn't there. He would travel from one spring to another in the hills, removing branches or fallen leaves or debris that might pollute the water. But his work was unseen. One year the town council decided they had better things to do with their money. No one supervised the old man anyway. They had roads to repair and taxes to collect and services to offer, and giving money to an unseen stream-cleaner had become a luxury they could no longer afford. So the old man left his post. High in the mountains, the springs went untended; twigs and branches and worse muddied the liquid flow. Mud and silt compacted the creek bed; farm wastes turned parts of the stream into stagnant bogs. For a time no one in the village noticed. But after a while, the water was not the same. It began to look brackish. The swans flew away to live elsewhere. The water no longer had a crisp scent that drew children to play by it. Some people in the town began to grow ill. All noticed the loss of sparkling beauty that used to flow between the banks of the streams that fed the town. The life of the village depended on the stream, and the life of the stream depended on the keeper. The city council reconvened, the money was found, the old man was rehired. After yet another time, the springs were cleaned, the stream was pure, children played again on its banks, illness was replaced by health, the swans came home, and the village came back to life. The life of a village depended on the health of the stream. The stream is your soul. And you are the keeper.¹⁵

2. *"Paul followed Jesus by living as he lived. And how did he do that? **Through activities and ways of living** that would train his whole personality to depend on the risen Christ as Christ trained himself to depend on the Father."¹⁶ (emphasis mine)
 - a. "I cannot transform myself, or anyone else for that matter. What I can do is create the conditions in which spiritual transformation can take place, by developing and maintaining a rhythm of spiritual practices that keep me open and available to God."¹⁷*

¹⁵ Ortberg, J. p. 13

¹⁶ Willard, Dallas. *The Spirit of the Disciplines*. HarperSanFrancisco. 1988. p.106

¹⁷ Barton, R. loc. 88

- b. "In the final analysis, there is nothing we can do to transform ourselves into persons who love and serve as Jesus did except to make ourselves available for God to do that work of transforming grace in our lives."¹⁸
 - c. "To focus on my soul means to look at my life under the care and connection of God. To focus on myself apart from God means losing awareness of what matters most."¹⁹
3. Who's in control?
- a. "The difference between conforming ourselves and being conformed is the vital issue of control."²⁰
 - b. "'You did not choose me. I chose you' (John 15:16). There is a radical difference between the two halves of this statement. If we have chosen Jesus, we retain control of the relationship. We determine what role Jesus has in our life. We determine what role Jesus plays in our vocation, in our relationships, in our leisure time, in our recreational activities, in our selection of reading materials, in our choice of movies and TV programs, in our friendships. But if we allow Jesus to choose us, there is inherent in that action a relinquishment of control of the relationship to Jesus."²¹
 - c. "We love God because he first loved us. We long for God because he first longed for us. We reach for God because he first reached for us. Nothing in the spiritual life originates with us. It all originates with God."²²
4. Some of the spiritual disciplines (practices) we will be looking at:
- a. Silence
 - b. Solitude
 - c. Simplicity
 - d. Meditation
 - e. Contemplation
 - f. Lectio Divina/Scripture Reading
 - g. The Examen

¹⁸ Mulholland, R. p. 26

¹⁹ Ortberg, J. p. 46

²⁰ Mulholland, R. p. 25

²¹ *ibid.* p. 154

²² Barton, R. loc 259

- h. Confession
- i. Celebration/Worship
- j. Rest/Sabbath
- k. Community
- l. Fasting
- m. Generosity
- n. Centering Prayer
- o. Retreat
- p. Service
- q. Memorization