



GCI *Buzz*

Healthy Church: Spiritual Formation



Spiritual Formation

02

Noun

Definition: an intentional process for developing people.

1. “A process of being conformed to Christ for the sake of others.” [2]
2. The process and practices employed by the Father, Son, and Spirit by which believers grow to become more and more like Christ.



Supporting Scriptures:

03

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. – **John 15:1-4**

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” – **Matthew 11:28-30**

Process:

04

The process of spiritual formation may not be what immediately comes to mind when one thinks of the traditional idea of a process. Instead of a methodical step-by-step list of actions to follow, the process of spiritual formation can more aptly be identified as a never-ending journey in your walk with Christ.

Think of your human relationships, there is no final destination where you arrive at the perfect relationship. **A relationship is an ever growing, ever-changing process.**

There are, however, practices that can act as tools to enhance your spiritual formation. Historically, the church has displayed a connection between **discipline and desire.**

Process:

05

“From its beginning the church linked the desire for more of God to intentional practices, relationships and experiences that gave people space in their lives to ‘keep company’ with Jesus. These intentional practices, relationships and experiences we knew as spiritual disciplines. The basis of disciplines for the first believers is found in Acts 2:42.” [2]

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” Acts 2:42

These practices have varied throughout time, but the disciplines of prayer, confession, worship, stewardship, fellowship, service, attention to Scripture, and the Lord’s Supper have remained constant channels and disciplines of grace.

There are three main categories of spiritual disciplines:

1. Inward - practiced in the privacy of our intimate walk with Jesus

Ex: Journaling, prayer walks, Sabbath

2. Outward - practiced through how we interact with the world

Ex: stewardship, humility, meals with family and friends

3. Corporate - practiced with others

Ex: compassion, witness, worship, and service ^[1]

Supporting Thoughts:

07

- **Conformity to Christ is countercultural and a surrender of our own control.**

Scripture is quite clear in its insistence that we have fallen short of God's purposes for our creation. It is equally clear in its revelation that God works graciously through all the aspects of human life to bring us to the fulfillment of God's will for our wholeness. Thus, spiritual formation is a process of involvement with God's gracious work. But spiritual formation as a process will be seen to move against the grain of our instant-gratification culture and the possessiveness of an acquisitive society. Once we understand spiritual formation as a process, all of life becomes spiritual formation. Cooperation with God's gracious work moves us toward the wholeness of Christ. Rebellion against God's gracious work moves us into destructive and dehumanizing emptiness, into increasingly dysfunctional lives that are self-destructive and treat others as objects to be manipulated and used for our own purposes. Scripture is also clear in its witness to the fact that only God can liberate us from our bondage, heal our brokenness, cleanse us from our uncleanness and bring life out of our deadness. We cannot do it by ourselves. Thus, spiritual formation is the experience of being shaped by God toward wholeness. ^[2]

Supporting Thoughts:

08

- **“We are spiritual beings whose emotions, psychology, body, and mind are the incarnation of our spiritual life in the world.” [2]**

We will see that holistic spirituality always takes place amid our emotional, psychological, physical and mental conditions and emerges out of them. We will also see in part two that in holistic spirituality any “one-size-fits-all” prescription is not realistic. We are unique persons, and our relationship with God always manifests that individuality. Our process of spiritual formation toward wholeness may be very different from others.

- **“There can be no personal holiness without social holiness.” [2]**

Much of what passes for spiritual formation these days is a very privatized, individualized experience. It does not enliven and enrich the body of Christ, nor is it vitally dependent upon the body of Christ for its own wholeness. Neither does it play itself out in the dynamics of life in the world. It doesn't bring the reality of relationship with God and Jesus Christ to bear upon the brokenness and the pain in the world around us. Thus, corporate and social spirituality is an essential part of our holistic spiritual formation.

Supporting Thoughts:

09

- **Spiritual formation is not an option.**

“...life itself is a process of spiritual development. The only choice we have is whether that growth moves us toward wholeness in Christ or toward an increasingly dehumanized and destructive mode of being.” [2]

Reminders:

- Spiritual Practices are about spiritual transformation not behavior modification. [1]
- We all have different circumstances, so our disciplines will be different. We will also adjust as we enter different seasons.
- The delight is mutual. You will grow in delight for God’s presence, and you are dearly loved by the Creator of the universe who delights to be with you.

The Essentials:

Jesus is both the beginning and end of spiritual formation, and the church plays a central role in this process.

We are not the authors or finishers of this process, but we can and should actively participate.

References:

1. Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg. *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us*. IVP Books, an Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2015.
2. Mulholland, M. Robert, and R. Ruth Barton. *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation*. InterVarsity Press, 2016.