

Growing

A Five Day Devotional

A Process

Sunday we dove into what we mean when we think about spiritual growth. We used this helpful definition from Robert Mulholland: *“Spiritual Formation is (1) a process (2) of being formed (3) in the image of Christ (4) for the sake of others.”*

The first part of spiritual formation is that it is a process; a journey. We can get frustrated when we think we can take shortcuts or will always expect quick growth. One of the ways to appreciate the journey of your spiritual life is by sketching a timeline of your faith history.

Use the space below to draw a timeline that begins with your birth and extends through today. Think of the people, places, and moments that have been most important for your faith. Not all experiences will be positive, but knowing what has shaped you will help you understand how you arrived at your current place of faith. Think about the ways God’s grace has redeemed your detours. How has God’s transforming presence met you at each turn in the road? What brought you to the place you find yourself today? When you get done with the exercise. Ask yourself where you want this timeline to go as you continue to walk with Jesus.



Being Formed

The second part of our definition of spiritual growth tells us that spiritual formation involves “being formed.”

The key word behind this phrase is control. What is in control of what you are being formed into? Who influences and motivates what you want to be formed into? For many of us we want to be the drivers of our spiritual lives and set the limits on how far we go and what it looks like.

The beautiful part of “being formed” is that it is not something you have to do, it is something God does in you. The Lord often guides us to unexpected places and challenges us to greater depths than we imagined. It takes great courage to yield to what God may be calling you to.

“In the final analysis there is nothing we can do to transform ourselves into persons who love and serve as Jesus did except make ourselves available for God to do that work of transforming grace in our lives.” — Robert Mulholland

Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.

Ephesians 4:21-24 NLT

Image of Christ

The third part of our definition of spiritual formation tells us that we are being formed “into the image of Christ.”

The early Christians were called “followers of The Way” which referred to the way/path/lifestyle of Jesus. We are not called to a generic spiritual life, but a specific path to follow. This is why Paul writes: “...since you have put off the old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self. You are being renewed in knowledge according to the image of your Creator (Colossians 3:9b–10.”

Growing into the image of Christ meaning growing into wholeness. Becoming a person who heals, forgives, has compassion, loves others, and invites them to experience God’s grace. Being formed into the image of Christ will challenge us in the areas where we are least like Jesus. The places we hold onto for ourselves became places God challenges us to let go of.

It doesn’t take long for us to think about those places of unlikeness to the image of Christ. Part of the journey is learning to identify and let go of those places.

So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires. Don’t be greedy, for a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world. Because of these sins, the anger of God is coming. You used to do these things when your life was still part of this world.

But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language. Don’t lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him.

Colossians 3:5-10 NLT

For The Sake of Others

The final part of the definition of spiritual formation tells us that it is “for the sake of others.” It is not for self-actualization or individual holiness in a vacuum. When we leave this final part out we get self-righteous Christians.

When we forget that we are on this journey of being formed in the image of Christ FOR the sake of others we lose the mission of Jesus. We forget our calling to be a “light to the nations.” We neglect being inviters.

Jesus summarized the whole law in the command to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” and to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mk 12:30-31),

When we leave the “for others” part out we privatize and individualize our journey with God. Eventually, a spiritual life based only on you and God will face tension. A healthy spiritual life with God MUST overflow into the life you share with others.

Jesus replied, “*The most important commandment is this: ‘Listen, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.’ The second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ No other commandment is greater than these.*”

Mark 12: 29-31 NLT

For The Sake of Others

Over the course of this week we dove into the topic of spiritual growth and what it looks like. As you reflect back on the exercise on day one, which of the four parts of spiritual formation do you need to focus on in order to see the most growth in your spiritual life in 2024? Which area comes most naturally to you?

As you start this year off, know that you will not drift into spiritual growth. So much around you is pulling you towards a different type of life. To grow spiritually takes intentionality and time, but it is not all dependent on you. The Lord is doing the change in your life. Your responsibility is to listen, be available, and trust where He is leading you. Surround yourself with other followers of The Way who are focused on growing.

As you end this week, reflect on these words from Ephesians and commit to living them out in 2024.

But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into him who is the head—Christ. From him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building itself up in love by the proper working of each individual part.

Ephesians 4:15–16 CSB