



A Prayer Group Bible study

SPIRITUAL FORMATION

SERIES

“SPIRITUAL FORMATIONS SERIES”

PRACTICING THE WAY!

Week 1

Spiritual Formation in simple term means to be transformed by following “**Jesus**”

WHO ARE WE FOLLOWING?

Everybody is following somebody – or at least something. Put it another way, we’re all disciples.

The question isn’t, *Am I a disciple?* It’s who or what am I a disciple of?

If you say I am a disciple of **Jesus**, the question is whether Jesus is following you or am I following **Jesus**? How is that working out for you? In an urban environment and in the age of influence, we all aspire to lead and not follow. How is that working out for you?

Is there a gap  between our belief and behaviour?

Is our hurry and busyness the greater intruder of our lives?

With the rise of social media empires and their spooky digital algorithms, these powerful forces now have direct access to our flows of consciousness every time we slide our thumbs across our phones. What we are led to believe are just ads, news links, retweets, and random digital flotsam are, in reality, mass behaviour modification techniques intentionally designed to influence how we think, feel, believe, shop, vote and live.

Quoting the tech philosopher,

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“What might once have been called advertising must now be understood as continuous behaviour modification on a titanic scale.

The “world” - Jaron Lanier

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The “world” (as its called in the New Testament) is forming us or manipulating us constantly.

But what is it forming us into?

IF WE'RE NOT BEING INTENTIONALLY FORMED BY JESUS HIMSELF, THEN IT'S HIGHLY LIKELY WE ARE BEING UNINTENTIONALLY FORMED BY SOMEONE OR SOMETHING ELSE.

The deeper question here is, *In whom are you trusting? Who (or what) do you put your faith in to show you the way to the life you desire? Whose content am I consuming?', 'Whose posts am I liking and sharing?', or 'Whose channels am I subscribing to?', but ultimately, 'Whose vision of the good life is shaping who I'm becoming?' Are we following the world's guru's vision of good life or what Jesus shows us about good life?*

WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO SPIRITUAL GROWTH?

We can cite different reasons our laziness, disinterest, busyness, our phones take a lot of time, or our schedules are too hectic etc. Ancient church leaders used to say that the greatest barrier for spirituality is our addiction to material things. John the Apostle the beloved disciple of Jesus understood this principle by walking with the Lord.

1 John 2:15-17, “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. 16 For everything in the world—**the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life**—comes not from the Father but from the world. 17 The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.”

THE GOAL ISN'T TO ISOLATE OURSELVES FROM ALL OTHER WISDOM, NOR SWALLOW IT WHOLESALE, BUT TO DEVELOP DISCERNMENT IN INTEGRATING VALUABLE INSIGHTS FROM VARIOUS SOURCES INTO A LIFE SHAPED PRIMARILY BY THE WAY OF JESUS.

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Michael Zigarelli's 5-year, worldwide study of “obstacles to spiritual growth” cites a new thought on barriers to spiritual growth that

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1 Christians are assimilating to a **culture of busyness, hurry and overload**, which leads to **2** **God becoming more marginalized in Christians' lives**, which leads to **3** a deteriorating relationship with God, which leads to **4** **Christians becoming even more vulnerable to adopting secular assumptions** about how to live, which leads to **5** more conformity to a culture of busyness, hurry and overload. And then the cycle begins again.



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Rolheiser describes the present age that we live in as, “Today, a number of historical circumstances are blindly flowing together and accidentally conspiring to produce a climate within which it is difficult not just to think about God or to pray, but simply to have any interior depth whatsoever.... We, for every kind of reason, good and bad, are distracting ourselves into spiritual oblivion. It is not that we have anything against God, depth, and spirit, we would like these, it is just that we are habitually too preoccupied to have any of these show up on our radar screens. We are more busy than bad, more distracted than nonspiritual, and more interested in the movie theatre, the sports stadium, and the shopping mall and the fantasy life they produce in us than we are in church. **Pathological busyness, distraction, and restlessness are major blocks today within our spiritual lives.**”

HAVE YOU CHECKED WHETHER YOU HAVE THESE SYMPTOMS LATELY?

Irritability, hypersensitivity, restlessness (when you try to rest), compulsive overworking, emotional numbness, escapist behaviours like alcohol, food, binge-watching, disconnected from identity and calling, not able to attend to spiritual practices, not able to attend to human needs.

JESUS WOULD SAY TO OUR ENTIRE GENERATION WHAT HE SAID TO MARTHA: “YOU ARE WORRIED AND UPSET ABOUT MANY THINGS, BUT FEW THINGS ARE NEEDED—OR INDEED ONLY ONE.”

We have to come to believe that there is a Way of life laid down by Jesus himself, and that if we give ourselves to it – and ultimately to him – it will lead to the life we all most truly crave. Jesus himself lived that life on this earth and set an example for us.

You must be a Christian from a long time but now you want to add a new level of intentionality to your spiritual formation. To live on purpose and not on accident.

All through the gospels, Jesus said, Come, follow me! We are looking at following Jesus way of life and His words to live in this present. Contrary to what many assume, Jesus did not invite people to convert to Christianity. He didn’t even call people to become Christians; he invited people to apprentice under Him into a whole new way of living. To be transformed.

So, our thesis is simple: **Transformation is possible if we are willing to arrange our lives around the practices, rhythms, and truths that Jesus himself did, which will open our lives to God’s power to change.** Said in another way, we can be transformed if we are willing to apprentice (learn and train) ourselves to Jesus.

In simple terms – Practice the Way of Jesus

PLEASE KNOW THAT PRACTICES ARE NOT AN END ITSELF. ITS ONLY TO CREATE A SACRED SPACE FOR GOD TO COME AND WORK IN YOUR LIFE.

We need to see Jesus not just as a Savior of the world, He is also a brilliant, wise, spiritual master of how to live and thrive in this world – our Father’s world. This type of learning for life from Jesus has to be intentional otherwise our approach to Jesus is only for forgiveness and only to reserve a seat in heaven.

Learning from Jesus wasn’t so much about retaining data as it was about gaining essential wisdom for living. To follow Jesus, then, meant to walk alongside him in a posture of listening, learning, observation, obedience, and imitation. The goal of first disciples or apprentices of Jesus wasn’t to pass a test, get a degree, or receive a certificate to frame on your office wall; but it was to master the art of living in God’s good world by learning from Jesus on how to make steady progress into the Kingdom of God.

Meditate on these Key verses:

Matthew 11:28-30 (NIV), “28 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 **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**. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Matthew 11:28-30 (MSG), “28-30 “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? **Come to me**. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. **Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it**. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. **Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.**”

Mark 8:34-37 (NIV), 34 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: **“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me**. 35 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. 36 What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? 37 Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?

John 15:5 (NIV), “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

1 Timothy 4:7-8 (NIV), 7 Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, **train yourself to be godly**. 8 For physical training is of some value, but **godliness has value for all things**, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

Two Important Take away Thoughts

- **Pay Attention to your spiritual growth in the world of distractions.**

W.H. Auden writes: "Choice of attention—to pay attention to this and ignore that—is to the inner life what choice of action is to the outer. In both cases man is responsible for his choice and must accept the consequences.

As Ortega y Gasset said: 'Tell me to what you pay attention, and I will tell you who you are.'

Sustained attention to the person of Jesus—setting our minds on things above, where Christ is—is the aim and substance of spiritual life.

Colossians 3:1, "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, **set your hearts on things above**, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 **Set your minds on things above**, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and **your life is now hidden with Christ** in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

- **Practice... Practice... Practice... Don't give up!**

We must remember that understanding alone is not sufficient for growth. Christ-followers must be both hearers and doers of the word. The idea is not that once you understand, transformation in Christ is instantaneously delivered.

Understanding is just the starting point, introducing us to the path of transformation in Christ. However, true transformation requires us to engage with these truths through intentional actions and habits, embodying them in our daily lives.

"EVERYBODY WANTS TO TRANSFORM, BUT NOBODY WANTS TO CHANGE."

"To Become a butterfly sounds so lovely until you realize that there are things about caterpillar life that you rather like and don't want to give up."



Matthew 7:24-27, “Therefore **everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice** is like a **wise man** who built his **house on the rock**. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. 26 But **everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice** is like a **foolish man** who built his **house on sand**. 27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

In the next few weeks, we'll delve into spiritual practices that will guide us on a journey towards becoming more like Jesus, transforming our hearts and lives to reflect His love and character. The next three weeks we are going to learn and relearn about the importance of spiritual formation and inculcate a new daily prayer rhythm or daily quiet time with God. We will re-visit the prayer practice when we move study more about spiritual habits.

TO DO

- 1.Habit Audit – identify your time wasters / time eaters and reorganize it.**
- 2.One of the best ways to make space for God is through a daily prayer rhythm, where you create a time and place for solitude, silence, and prayer.**
- 3.As you go, commit to kindness, gentleness, grace, and confidentiality for one another. Remember, this is not a time to tear one another down, but to share vulnerability.**

To Ask yourself:

- 01 When you envision starting your day with silence, solitude, and prayer, what excites you? What challenges you?
- 02 Think about your week and come up with a plan. When and where will you engage in this practice?



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