**Big Picture of Spiritual Disciplines**

**Lecture 5**

**John Parrish**

**Text**: 2 Corinthians 3:17-18

Exodus 33:17-20

**Theme**: God has placed in each human being the desire to aspire higher. This desire on a soul level is the longing to become glorified/transformed in his likeness. As we yield ourselves to Him His Spirit transforms our character from the inside out to shape us more into his likeness and restores the image that was broken in the fall of humanity.

**Prayer**

“Father, we are once again reminded of all that you are doing on our behalf. Father, this morning reading from your word, Psalm 8 just came to mind and you talked about the wonders that you blessed us with. As we think about how you are transforming us in your image and likeness, what an exciting process that we’re engaged in, that you would love us so much to honor us in this way! So, Lord, today as we focus on spiritual formation and transformation and what that looks like, and particularly what the spiritual disciplines are all about, would you be our Teacher, our Counselor? Father, may I speak truth of you. And I pray that our hearts would be aligned with you and that the work of your Holy Sprit would be transforming us even as we engage your word. By your Spirit we pray and in the name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.”

**Introduction**

My name is John Parish. It’s an honor to be with you and to be part of this series as well. Just to give you a little background on myself: I’m a PK, which means Preacher’s Kid. I have had a wonderful opportunity to grow up in a Christian home and to be able to see what God does in a lot of peoples’ lives. My father, as a pastor, goes back to Coral Ridge today. We came into Fort Lauderdale when I was 12 years old. In that process, my father came on at Coral Ridge as the Minister of Evangelism there. And then from there, Evangelism Explosion started growing and he attended the first clinic that was at Coral Ridge. And from there, the work of the ministry continued to grow and there was an international development with that. He became the Executive Director at Coral Ridge and then at Evangelism Explosion. So I have had a wonderful heritage with that. After I went to seminary, I got to work with him for ten years. He moved to Atlanta where he developed relational training evangelism. That relational approach was a wonderful thing to be a part of. He was a wonderful mentor and an encourager to me. I learned a lot of things from him during those ten years. After that, I became involved in a couple churches in the Atlanta area. I worked in adult education and small groups. I had a wonderful experience with those local churches. After that I moved to Asheville where Evangelism Explosion International is located now. I work at the Billy Graham training center on all the programs that are offered there. I’ve been there for about 18 years.

That was a wonderful journey for me in the realm of spiritual formation and transformation and what that looks like. To give you a story to help illustrate my point: there are a lot of questions that come to mind when you think about spiritual formation. As I watched the 40 – 50 speakers that would come each year and teach four sessions a day for three days. At the end there would be a testimony time. It was always interesting to hear what God is doing in peoples’ lives. And in that I began to recognize some interesting things that would happen. There are some who would say, “This has been a great experience for us. We’ve enjoyed the food, that atmosphere, everything so much.” That was good. I enjoyed hearing that. And then there was another end of the spectrum; those of us in teaching and training ministry long for these moments. And that is the realm of transformation. In that respect, people would get up and say, “God is convicting me of something in my life that needs to change.” And some confess issues of pornography and lack of forgiveness. We would see brokenness, weeping, and a repentance of heart. We would start to see authentic transformation going on in peoples’ lives. They have an ongoing, meaningful relationship with God that leads to lasting change on their part. So why the difference between these two groups of people who were given the same opportunities, the same setting, the same Bible, the same teaching opportunities. Why the difference?

All change is of God. God is the initiator, the instigator, the prompter, the transformer himself through his Holy Spirit in our lives. But there is a responsibility on our part. As we get into this topic of spiritual formation, we will look at a lot of questions. But this was the big question that got me into the subject of spiritual formation: What is our responsibility? God will always be the initiator, but what is our responsibility in spiritual formation that will lead to lasting life change on our part. This is what spiritual formation is all about.

**Expectations**

1. Take notes to review later.
   1. Francis Bacon said, “Writing makes an exact man.” so as you engage and take notes, you will find yourself coming out on the other side with a lot more than if you don’t take notes.
2. Ask questions of yourself and of the course.
   1. The questions will be the keys that unlock the doors for you with respect to spiritual formation, so explore and ask as many questions as you like.
   2. Follow those questions and see where they take you as well.
3. Enjoy the learning process here.
   1. Be a lifelong learner. Learning will be an eternal process because once we leave this life we will go into heaven. God is the only one who is infinite. We will always be finite. There will always be more to learn even when we get to heaven. Enjoy the process of learning and engaging.
4. Apply what you learn.
   1. This whole process is not just about information, but transformation. It is not just about inputting more knowledge in our heads, but so that the information can lead to transformation on our part. So don’t leave it at the level of information. Look for how God speaks to your heart and changes your heart and leads you into different ways of acting, relating, and behaving.
   2. To know often means to input facts, but in the Scripture ‘to know’ means ‘to do’. In other words, you don’t know something until you act upon it. So we want to act upon those things that we are learning about the spiritual disciplines, so that it leads to a change in our behavior, our relations, and our attitude with God and others.

**Key Questions**

1. Where do the spiritual disciplines fit into the overall picture of spiritual formation?
2. How do they help us? How do they facilitate that process for us?
3. How do they influence us for good and allow us to be a change for good?
4. What does it mean to be formed in Christ-likeness?
5. What is Spiritual Transformation?

**Big Picture Perspective**

Spiritual disciplines are one lever; they are not the only lever in the process of spiritual formation. Let me put this analogy before you: In the United States we have shopping malls. A shopping mall is hundreds of stores under one roof. You can go to a shopping mall and visit all these shops and never go outside. Let me suggest in this process as we look at the spiritual disciplines, let’s say spiritual formation is the counterpart of the mall. The big picture is the mall that is spiritual formation. Within that mall there are individual places you can go and you can purchase things. But in this case you are looking at the spiritual disciplines as one little shop within that bigger spiritual formation mall. So realize we are walking into one store in the process of what it means to grow in Christ and how that comes about and how Christ influences that process for us. So think of this as a shopping mall experience. Let’s look at what the spiritual disciplines are all about.

This may be something new to you as you think about spiritual formation. What is spiritual formation? The first time I remember hearing that term was in the 80s. Roberta Hestenes, who was a professor at Fuller Seminary, became a spokesperson for spiritual formation. Before that, I had never heard that term. It was something totally new to me. And that might be the same thing for you here. As we talk about spiritual formation, this may be a new term, something that you have not encountered before. Richard Foster was another gentleman in the 80s who produced a book, *The Celebration of Discipline* (1984), in which the term “spiritual formation” came to be. I highly recommend that book to you. Now before that the most common term that was used for developing a person’s growth in Christ was “Christian education”. Henrietta Meres started back in the 1940s as a big Christian educator. She introduced what it means within church context to encourage peoples’ growth in Christ, and that was called “Christian education”. So from the 1940s – 1980s that was the most common term. You would often have a director of Christian education. Now in some churches you will find a director of spiritual formation. All that to say that there is a terminology that comes with this and I would like to acquaint you with that. You may find some new terms that come into play here.

**Key Terms**

1. **Spiritual Formation** / Christian Education – **the** **process of being conformed to the image and likeness of Jesus Christ.** It is not an event. We will make that distinction. It is the process of sanctification in us.
   1. Colossians 1:24-28 (read aloud) – In the early church Scripture was all read aloud, so let’s engage in that process of hearing the Scripture as well as seeing it.
      1. “Christ in you, the hope of glory” - This is spiritual formation
      2. “Mature in Christ” – **Spiritual formation is the process of being presented before Christ as mature in Christ**. Here Paul is laying the stage for spiritual formation. It’s the maturity process that we grow in Christ. He’s also saying that the process is Christ in you! What does all that mean?
2. **Justification** – **the process whereby we are justified before God because of the atoning work of Christ on our behalf.**
   1. It is an act, an event. A point in time in which we are transformed into our relationship with God through the atoning work of Jesus Christ when we receive Him as our Lord and Savior.
   2. We are made just before Him, made righteous in His sight before God because of Christ over us. In this process we are changed but we are also ever changing.
3. **Sanctification** – **the ever-changing process.**
   1. That is what happens in our body in this life until we die and are presented before the Father and before Christ.
   2. Scripture says we are transforming from glory to glory. Our glory is changing out of this process.
   3. This process of spiritual formation/sanctification is something that happens in a body. That is key and that is where the spiritual disciplines come into the process. It happens in our bodies. **Spiritual Formation is the process of sanctification for us.** 
      1. That process of change will be different for different people.
         * 1. Abraham – How did he come into awareness of God? Was it a sudden incident in which he came into faith in Christ? Or was it a journey of faith for him? For some people our transformation is like Abraham. It is a journey of faith that grows and grows and grows until we come into an awareness of who God is and we worship him for the God that he is.
           2. Paul – He thought he was in relationship with God, but it was not until the Damascus Road happened that suddenly his life was transformed. Instantly in that process he was made aware of God and he came to faith in Jesus Christ. Sometimes this happens today with Muslims. 2/3 of Muslims who come to faith in Christ today do so because of visions and dreams, which may be beyond our expectations or experiences and may be a little disconcerting to us, but that is the reality of how God is working today in the Muslim world, which is an exciting thing to think. Often times, it is a sudden thing that comes upon them and they don’t know anything other than it is God working in their life and transforming them.
4. **Glorification** – when we reach heaven we are glorified.
   1. The work has been accomplished for us in that we are perfected in Christ.
   2. **We are like Christ when we see Him face to face.**
   3. Analogy of a coin: When God looks at us He sees the whole realm of our sin, of our life, everything that we have done. But Jesus Christ is like that coin. When we come into the presence of God, that coin comes closer and closer toward the eyes of God and no longer does He see the big things out here. He sees one thing that is Christ in front of us. And so in that process when God looks at us, He sees Jesus. And that process that is accomplished in this life for us is something that will happen also in glory when we are presented before Him there.
5. **Life Change** – **essentially what happens to us in this life in which our life is changed to be more Christ-like.** The incremental changes that happen in this life in this world
6. **Transformation** – is the whole process from beginning our walk with God until the process of glorification where we are with Him. **It is the whole process of what God is involved with in conforming us into His image and into His likeness.**

**Two Assumptions**

* + - 1. **All change is a work of God**. All change is a result of God’s work in our life.
      2. **Spiritual Disciplines are a vehicle that God uses for that change process**. **It is a work of God.** It is a **“tool”** for transformation. But let’s not confuse the “tool” for transformation with the end result. It is a “tool” that God uses for us to be transformed in His image and in His likeness. They are the **means** to the change, a vehicle for change for us. (Example – prayer, meditation, Bible study are all vehicles or means of growth or means of grace that God gives us to come into greater awareness of Him. Prayer is not what makes us righteous.)
  1. It is a **vehicle** that helps us, but often times it can be looked at through a legalistic lens as to whether you are righteous or not. But that is not the case.
  2. It is **not the goal**. The “tool” is not the goal. It is a vehicle for us to accomplish what God is after which is spiritual formation.
  3. It is also **not a destination**. It is not that we become perfected when performing a particular discipline in our life. It is always a “tool” that helps us to engage God and to be more fully active in His presence.
  4. It is also **not a good luck charm**. As if you do the spiritual disciplines you will be more fortunate, that God will smile upon you, or that you will be more blessed by Him in this process.
  5. It is **not a formula**. It is not a formula for leveraging God in the process.
     1. The book of Job – you see the mindset of a formula. The unfortunate story where Satan comes into God’s presence asking for permission to afflict Job because he thinks that Job’s relationship with God is based on all the benefits that he experiences from God. So in the process of Satan afflicting Job, Job loses his house, his family, and his wealth. He has boils and he’s scraping them, so he sits down and his wife comes to him and says, “Curse God and die. You’re just afflicted.” And then Job’s friends come to help him and in the process they try to offer words of encouragement, but their encouragement to him is a formula. The formula that Job’s friends had in their life was to say, “Job, you’re suffering. When God is present in someone’s life, you’re prospering. But you’re not prospering. You’re afflicted and so you must have offended God in some way. You need to confess and make things right with God.” Job says, “I haven’t done anything. In my awareness before God, I am a righteous man.” But his friends had a formula. Their formula was if you sin you’re afflicted. If God blesses you, you experience prosperity.
     2. Old Testament – This formula is a legitimate paradigm God’s presence often manifested itself in financial blessing or prosperity or a larger family. All of these were the signs of God’s presence in a person’s life.
     3. New Testament – What is the formula there? If you look at the Sermon on the Mount, for example, whom does God say He blesses? Blessed are you when you’re afflicted, when you suffer for righteousness sake, when you are persecuted for God. So there is a shift from Old to New Testament where God’s blessing may have been and may still be a prosperity that God rests upon you and encourages you and gives you things. But more so, God seems to bless you in times of hardship and adversity where He’s forming our souls because that’s the greater benefit that God is looking for. In spiritual formation all the pain and suffering may be more valuable to us than anything else that we seem to enjoy in this life. Pain is a vehicle for God’s transformation in our lives as well. The spiritual disciplines are a vehicle for transformation into the image and likeness of Christ. Spiritual disciplines are a “tool”. They are not an end in and of themselves, not a destination, not an end game, not a formula, or a good luck charm.

How do I grow in Christ-likeness? That is the underlying question that starts the whole journey of understanding the disciplines and spiritual formation on our behalf

**Two Book Recommendations**

1. *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* by Ken Boa – In this book, Ken talks about the realm of Christian experience. As we explore what it means to grow in Christ, Ken says it is like a diamond. There are at least 12 different facets to that question of how to grow in Christ-likeness. He talks about 12 approaches to New Testament Christian spirituality. Part of this process is the realization that we grow in a particular tradition or background. In that background or that tradition we often come to assume that spiritual formation is done by way of the tradition that we have grown up in. Ken says that as we go through life we value each of these twelve different perspectives. At different stages of life there are different needs and we value insight and help for how to grow in Christ. These twelve approaches are a “window” into which we look. We tend to answer that question “How do I grow in Christ likeness?” We tend to look through that “window” to address that question.

a. 12 Perspectives:

* + 1. **Relational Spirituality** – Here we are love God completely, ourselves correctly, and loving others compassionately. Where would that come from in Scripture? What about the Great Commandment? It says to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself. That is a vital part of how we grow in Christ-likeness: being aware of God’s love for us, and our love for Him, and our response to that.
    2. **Paradigm Spirituality** – This is about cultivating an eternal versus a temporal perspective
    3. **Exchanged Life Spirituality** – We’re grasping our true identity in Christ. In this journey our identity is in Jesus Christ. In order to understand our relationship with God, our performance. In Romans Paul says it is not I but Christ who lives in me. Our lives are exchanged with Christ’s and that is a legitimate perspective from Scripture.
    4. **Motivated Spirituality** – This is a set of Biblical incentives. For example if you come from a background where grace is emphasized, the atoning work of Jesus Christ. It is by grace we have been saved through faith, not by works. This is a legitimate Biblical paradigm for understanding our spirituality, but it is not the only one.
    5. **Devotional Spirituality** – Here you are focused on falling in love with God. Those of you who are familiar with John Piper, he would fit into this category. It is the love of God. Here we desire God. It is our passion for God and His passion for us that transforms us. So that is what growing in Christ-likeness looks like. It is about developing a passion for God. If you read about the Pilgrims and their journey from Great Britain to the United States, their writings show a tremendous devotional character in terms of how they grow in Christ-likeness.
    6. **Holistic Spirituality** – This is every component of life under the Lordship of Christ.
    7. **Process Spirituality** – This is an important perspective, which focuses on being rather than doing. It is concerned primarily with the process rather than product.
    8. **Spirit-Filled Spirituality** – In this perspective you are focused on walking in the Power of the Spirit.
    9. **Warfare Spirituality** – If you look at Ephesians 6 you will realize that God is involved in spiritual warfare with the devil and his minions as well. So if you look at growth as an engagement with evil, sin and Satan, then Ephesians 6 will explain those circumstances in life where we find ourselves challenged and where we need the spiritual disciplines. But with it is a theme of warfare and fighting and engaging with evil and with Satan himself. Neil Anderson is a popular author who has that particular perspective and writes about engaging spiritual warfare in your life.
    10. **Disciplined Spirituality** – This facet deals with the spiritual disciplines. Scripture says to study and show yourself approved, a worker in God’s sight. And so study and discipline becomes the vehicle, the “window” through which we view how our lives are transformed and changed. That is a legitimate “window” that we need to consider and be a part of and engage. Again, it is one part of the big picture of spiritual formation we are looking at here. You may be familiar with The Navigators. It is a wonderful ministry that helps you with the spiritual disciplines; you spend a lot of time memorizing Scripture and reading the Bible, and being accountable to others. These disciplines are the means by which we find ourselves growing in Christ-likeness.
    11. **Nurturing Spirituality** – This is a lifestyle of discipleship and evangelism.
    12. **Corporate Spirituality** – This perspective focuses on encouragement, accountability, and worship.
  1. Each spiritual paradigm, or “window” discussed is just one important facet in the gem of authentic and powerful New Testament living.

1. *A Spiritual Formation Workbook* by James Bryan Smith – written in the early 90s, it speaks to 5 historical perspectives/traditions or “streams” that are found within the Christian church that address the question of how to grow in Christ-likeness. **The overarching question in spiritual formation:** **How do I grow in Christ-likeness?**
   1. **Contemplative Tradition** (300-500 AD) – This tradition focuses on solitude, silence, and meditation. **It is the pulling away from the world to be silent in the presence of God.** Letting God’s Spirit be the one who informs you in the process of growing in Christ-likeness. This is an important one and personally, my favorite one.
   2. **Holiness Tradition** – This was the primary “stream” that John Wesley was engaged in. The process as we look through Scripture of growing in Christ-likeness by wrestling with sin. As we grow in the image of God, we grow to greater perfection, so it is a growth towards purity. There is a desire for purity in our heart and for a holy life by purging our lives from sin. This is a wonderful perspective and involves some great disciplines as well.
   3. **Charismatic Tradition** – This “stream” focuses on the power of the Spirit. The emphasis is on the power of God to transform our lives and the issues in our lives that we can’t change ourselves. The Spirit helps us to overcome. We want to grow in Christ-likeness by engaging the Spirit, and the Spirit is the one who transforms our lives. We make ourselves more available to the Spirit. The key words are power, and boldness, and strength. Through this paradigm, we come to greater Christ-likeness by accessing the power of the Holy Spirit.
   4. **Social Justice Tradition** – In the New Testament we see the parable of the Good Samaritan. It focuses on engaging my neighbor, taking on others and their causes who are facing injustice, who are in need of strength that I can give them, and to help transform them and point them to Jesus through serving them. I stand up for the needs of others who are being afflicted, who are experiencing injustice. It is through the process of engaging my neighbor that I grow in Christ-likeness and they grow in Christ-likeness as well. This is essentially loving my neighbor and seeking justice for others.
   5. **Evangelical Tradition** – emphasis on the word of God and evangelism. The Bible is the textbook for our lives. We engage it so that it transforms our hearts, our minds, and our lives. We live by that book. Through this process we reach out and make Jesus known through evangelism and through intentional processes of engaging others to win them to Christ as well.

The spiritual disciplines are a powerful lever for life change, but they are not the only lever for life change. They are a crucial and a critical aspect to it, but God has multiple opportunities for us to grow in Christ-likeness. In the New Testament, a rich man comes to Jesus and says ‘What must I do to grow in Christ-likeness?’ Jesus says, ‘Love your neighbor’ and gives him a list of things to do, which is typical of the mindset of that day. This man wanted the formula that would assure him of salvation, so he could control it. This was the typical mindset of the Pharisees, to reduce the means of growing in Christ-likeness to one thing. And what does Jesus say to him? He looks at his heart and says to him, ‘you’re a successful businessman. Go and sell everything that you have because I’m after your heart. I’m not just after the one thing. I’m after everything.’ So let’s look at spiritual disciplines as one means of growing in Christ, not the formula, not the only means, but it is a powerful means that helps transform us as well. Keep the big picture in mind as you practice the disciplines. Then select the “tool” or “tools” out of these disciplines that is most effective for you.

**As we are spiritually forming, what is changing in us?**

Out of all this there is a universal experience: God has created every person in His image and in His likeness. With that, all of us have something in common: **there is a longing within us to change**. Do you feel that in yourself? Do you feel that growing sense in you that there is more than what you are now that you want to become? So the question is: What am I becoming? Why do we desire to aspire higher? Why do we desire more? Could it be that this is part of what God has created within each of us, a longing for more because He knows that He has more in store for us to become? Where does that come from?

Think about your heroes over the years. (Pause and take 2-3 minutes to write down who those heroes were.) I’ll share some from my own life. At the age of 6, my favorite character was “Superman”. I wanted to be Superman. I had a cape and wanted to fly like “Superman”. I admired him; he was my hero. I aspired to be “Superman”. I also liked the cartoon character “Johnny Quest”. He was my hero. “Johnny Quest” would tackle any and every challenge, problem, obstacle, injustice, or evil. He was my hero. He always prevailed. At the age of 16, Billy Graham became my hero. When I was 8 I went to a Billy Graham crusade, and when I was 16 he came to my church to dedicate the new building in our church. To see him up close and personal was an amazing fulfillment because I aspired to be like Billy Graham. His heart, his character, his passion for lost people; He was my hero. At the age of 20, Abraham Lincoln was my hero. To see a man who faced adversity and challenges with a nation divided leaning on God and God allowed him to prevail. As I’ve gotten older my father, Archie Parrish has become my hero. He is a man who lives with integrity and aspires to become more, and always invested in so many others. Who are your heroes? What is it about those heroes that appeal to you? Is there something about them that you aspire to become?

As humans, we always aspire to become more. That goes back all the way to the beginning with Eve. **Read Genesis 3:2-6**. Humans universally desire to be more than what they are. This is part of what it means to be created in the image of God. Keep in mind that this is Adam and Eve in their perfect state. This is before the fall of mankind. And in this you will see a desire to aspire to be more than what they currently are, even in their perfect state here.

Genesis 3:6 - Eve wanted the wisdom it would give her. It is interesting to see the desire that was awakened here. There was something more that Eve thought she needed even more than what she currently had. She wanted the wisdom to know good and evil. Even in her perfected state before the fall of mankind, she still aspires to be more. That longing is to come to know what God knows. What is it that longs to be changed in us?

**Read 2 Corinthians 3:17-18.** This is the foundation for the topic of spiritual formation and transformation.What is changed in us as we grow in Christ-likeness? The context of this is talking about the veil that Moses had in the Old Testament. When Moses went into the presence of God his face was so changed that it distracted other people, so he had to put a veil over it. We are all being transformed into the same image, the image of God, from glory to glory.

**Analogies of Glory**

1. **Insurance Bluff** - Let’s talk about the context in which we are experiencing life right now. Years ago when I was at Covenant College there was a favorite place that a few of us students liked to go to. This place was called Insurance Bluff. Insurance Bluff was a place where people who made their living out of stealing cars and stripping them down would dispose of the evidence. This place was out of the way and right next to a 150 ft cliff. After these people were finished stripping down the stolen cars, they would run them off the cliff. If you got to the top of that cliff and looked down you would see a car down there, but it was not the original car that was stolen. You could identify it as a car, but it really wasn’t usable or drivable because it was so ruined. When we talk about glory and aspiring to be more, we are like cars that have fallen off a cliff. When Adam and Eve sinned against God, and we ourselves choose to sin against God, it is like the image of God in us has fallen off a cliff. You can still recognize it and tell what it is, but it is not what it was or what it should be. So the glory of the original car from the manufacturer is gone. In our case, that glory that has departed is something that longs to be restored. We want to be restored to the condition God has for us and longs for us to be, which is what happens at glorification.

2. **Floor Boards** - Now the longing in our hearts is like an adult man reflecting on his life. When he was growing up there was always fighting in his home, always something wrong, always arguing, always brokenness. It seemed to happen at the dinner table. His longing was for his family to be a family, to encourage, to love, and to grow. Often times as a child he would leave the house because he hated the fighting and go to his friend’s house. At dinner time, he would crawl under his friend’s house, there was a crawl space there, and he would crawl under the dinner table of the family next door. This family had a loving environment, encouraging environment. They would talk about their day. The parents affirmed their kids. He longed to be a part of that family and that household. As he lay underneath the floorboards, the longing of his heart was to be above the floorboards and to be a part of that family. The longings of our hearts that aspire to be more and different are similar to this little boy’s longings. We all lie beneath the floorboards of heaven and long for what’s above because what is above is where we were made to be. This is the longing of our heart when we talk about becoming more. God has created in us a longing to be more, but it becomes a place of transformation for us if we acknowledge it and accept it and we move towards it. And that is what the spiritual disciplines help us to do. We move with that longing more toward becoming like Christ and a part of His family.

3. **Dietrich Bonheoffer** - is a wonderful pastor who lived during a difficult time in Nazi Germany. He came to the conclusion that evil needed to be confronted and justice needed to be enforced. In the process he joined a conspiracy to kill Hitler, but the plot was discovered and thwarted and all those involved were imprisoned. He was executed in 1945, weeks before the concentration in which he was imprisoned was liberated. But the desire to become more is expressed in this prayer by Dietrich Bonheoffer entitled “Who Am I?” Listen because it is an experience that all of us share. In prison he writes,

“Who am I? They often tell me I would step from my cell's confinement calmly, cheerfully, firmly, like a squire from his country-house.

Who am I? They often tell me I would talk to my warden freely and friendly and clearly, as though it were mine to command.

Who am I? They also tell me I would bear the days of misfortune equably, smilingly, proudly, like one accustomed to win.

Am I then really all that which other men tell of, or am I only what I know of myself, restless and longing and sick, like a bird in a cage, struggling for breath, as though hands were compressing my throat, yearning for colors, for flowers, for the voices of birds, thirsting for words of kindness, for neighborliness, trembling with anger at despotisms and petty humiliation, tossing in expectation of great events, powerlessly trembling for friends at an infinite distance, weary and empty at praying, at thinking, at making, faint and ready to say farewell to it all.

Who am I? This or the other? Am I one person today, and tomorrow another? Am I both at once? A hypocrite before others, and before myself a contemptibly woebegone weakling? Or is something within me still like a beaten army, fleeing in disorder from victory already achieved?

Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine.

Whoever I am, Thou knowest, O God, I am thine. I am thine.”

**Glory**

So the longings of our heart are something God uses to stir our world, to stir our desires to be with him and to be more like him. Do we pay attention to those longings or do we ignore them? When they rise up within us, what is that all about? At the core of it is our desire to be transformed, our desire to long for heaven and to be more acquainted with God. And that is what spiritual disciplines are designed to do. We are broken souls now that are intended and destined for glory that is those of us who have placed our hope in Jesus Christ. As we talk about glory, let’s look at another passage to see what glory is all about.

**Read Exodus 33:17-20.** In this passage Moses has a conversation with God. In Moses’ desire to be more acquainted with God, he says, ‘Will you show me your presence? Will you show me what you’re like?’ God responds in an interesting way; it reveals to us what glory is all about. God said, ‘I will make my goodness pass before you.’ This is an interesting conversation here. Moses says, ‘Show me your glory.’ How does God respond? He says, ‘I will show you my goodness.’

* + - 1. **Goodness** - God says that glory is a reflection of His goodness. What is goodness? Goodness at its core is a character trait. So when Moses asked to see God’s glory, what does God offer? He says, ‘I’ll show you myself in a hidden way. I’ll put you off to the side to see my back. But I’ll show you my goodness, which at its core is my character. My character is at its core goodness. **Glory is all about character**. Character transformation is what God transforms in us. When we are being transformed from glory to glory, **it is our character that is being transformed in the process of becoming more Christ-like**.
      2. **Weighty** - In the Old Testament, glory is often describing an **important person**. If you have ever been in presence of an important person, there is weightiness to them. Hopefully that weightiness you sense is about character. Their character is attractive to you because it is so powerful and overwhelming. Often glory was associated with a king. “The glory of a king” which was essentially **his character and the things that he did were so impressive to other people**. This is what God is doing to us in the process of sanctification; he is making us weighty people. We take on the character of Christ and we become weightier people in the presence of others. People know us to be **different**. We are more patient, kind, self-sacrificing. People will say to us, ‘There is something different about you.’ That is encouraging because it is a character transplant. Character is essentially about reputation and our reputation changes with others so that others see this transformation in us. When we are transformed there is a character transplant that is taking place. The Holy Spirit at work in us is transplanting the character of Christ into us. And often times that comes through the spiritual disciplines. Through the spiritual disciplines, the character of Christ is becoming more and more visible to others through that process.
      3. **Virtues** - This is not about virtues. This term comes from the Greek perspective whereby you become a good person, you become a kind person, and there is more character formed in you. Christian character is different from virtue because **virtue requires effort on your part to become a better person, a virtuous man**. From the Christian perspective it is the work of the Holy Spirit who transforms our character. We are not the ones doing it; it is Christ in us who is transforming us. The work of the Holy Spirit in us creates that character trait of goodness, kindness, and patience.

**Three Levels -** How the spiritual disciplines help us in spiritual formation

Picture a circle with 3 levels, from outer to middle to inner. So out of all this the transformation that happens in us happens at all 3 levels. It is not relegated just to the conduct level and not just the character level, but it is also at the core level of our beliefs and whether we trust God enough to be sufficient for us in every way. Conduct, character, and core motives are all being transformed when we talk about spiritual formation.

**1. Conduct Level** – Outer level that is closest to other people. People know us through our conduct and through it we are developing a reputation.

Example: If you struggle with anger. You get angry easily and people need to be very careful with what they say around you. Anger is part of your conduct, but it is reflective of something deeper.

2. **Character** – Every conduct that is expressed is reflective of our inner core, which is our character.

Example: The character would be selfishness. Anger is a result of selfishness. Selfishness is the desire to have instead of giving to someone else. Anger is always the result of a blocked goal. All our behavior is designed to achieve a particular purpose.

3. **Core Motive/Belief** – The underlying reason for that character.

Example: Selfishness expresses itself in anger, but at the core of that is a core belief, which is a demanding spirit that things must go my way.

Example: If I want to get out of this door, my goal is to get out of this door. If someone interrupts me then I might get angry with that person. My desire is to get out of the door, but it is a blocked goal. At the core of my soul is the belief that my agenda needs to happen in order for me to have life.

**Character of God**

Now our broken soul, like that car that was driven off the cliff, at the core of us longs to be changed back to its intended glory. The glory is God’s character. That is what God designed us to be. It is the glory that he designed for us to have. So the character in us is changing to become more Christ-like,

Where do we see God’s character in Scripture? In talking about a character transplant, what does that character look like? Look at Jesus. What was Jesus’ character like when he lived on earth? Go to the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus modeled that character to us. Jesus is telling us what Christ-likeness looks like. **Read Matthew 5:2-12** Poor in spirit means humility – Jesus was poor in spirit. Isaiah talks about Jesus being a meek person; there was meekness about him. Jesus was persecuted for righteousness sake on the cross.Jesus talks about this character in the Sermon on the Mount and he models this character that he wants us to become. The term Christians means “little Christ”.

**Fruit of the Spirit**

What comes to mind when we talk about character transformation? The **fruits of the Spirit** are character traits that should be evident in our lives as we are being transformed into the likeness of Christ. Are these things forming in us? **Read Galatians 5:22-23 aloud**. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. As we think about spiritual formation, are these traits becoming more evident through us to those around us? Are we becoming more loving, more joyful in our attitude, more patient with others? Is there a spirit of kindness and generosity with others? Are we giving up control of ourselves so that God gains control of us, not manipulators of others but ministers to others. Spiritual formation is about character transformation. It is a character transplant that is evidenced by the Holy Spirit in us manifesting through the fruit of the Spirit that is actually the fruit of Jesus in us. Colossians 1:27 means Christ in you becomes the hope of your glory as we move forward.

**Faith**

In addition to character, our faith is being transformed through spiritual formation. Our trust in God should be increasing as we grow in Christ-likeness. As we think about character it is the “being” part of us. It is what others know of us as far as our reputation of who we are. The doing part of us, our character, is by which we become known. The doing part of us is also being transformed. **Read James 2:14-18. Faith is both an individual and corporate expression**. "Individual" meaning it is lived out by the daily decisions that we make, which are manifested for others to see. In the process the question becomes will I trustGod or will I not? Will I trust God’s provision for me or do I have to make it happen myself? Faith is also lived out in the context of other believers; therefore, it is a corporate expression too. It must be lived out in the context of community.

**1. Two Essential Requirements for Transformation** - You must have both to have authentic transformation.

1. Truth - In the context of community, truth gets spoken into our lives in areas in which we need to be transformed.
2. Community - You cannot just have truth and you cannot just have community. You must have both.

**Read 2 Thessalonians 1:3**

Increasing faith in the context of a community. This is a corporate and individual sense. Think about Moses and the children of Israel. When they were in the wilderness, it was their lack of faith that led to 40 years of wandering. That was God’s training ground for them. Because of the lack faith God said they would not enter the Promised Land. So they wandered until another generation arose who would grow in their faith and trust God. 40 years later, what happens? They are all lined up to go into the Promised Land, the priests are there with the Ark of the Covenant and they are standing at a swollen River Jordan. God says, ‘I want you on the other side.’ What is happening here? It requires faith. It wasn’t until the first priest acted in faith by stepping into the Jordan River that God parted the river, and they all walked across the river on dry ground. But it was an act of faith showing they trusted God and God rewarded them by giving them the Promised Land. The lack of faith led to 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. The act of faith led to a new Promised Land. Faith requires that action be taken.

**Read Hebrews 11**

This is the Hall of Fame of Faith. Look at each person listed there and the act of faith associated with that person. Noah built an ark; that was the act of faith on Noah’s part. Abraham left his home and went in a new direction into a new land. Rahab hid the Israelite spies and protected them at the threat of her own life. Hebrews tells us that without faith it is impossible to please God. So what is being transformed in addition to our character is our faith and we are growing in our faith and trust in God.

**2. Catalysts**

As you reflect on the catalysts that have helped you grow as a Christian, what are some of those catalysts in your life? I will share one from my own life: I was working in a church in Atlanta, which had wonderful people. But these people also had the propensity to offer suggestions about the way they thought I should be doing things I was doing in that church. They all had an agenda for my life. And in frustration I remember talking to my mentor and supervisor, Gene Williams, who was an incredible man of God. He was a fighter pilot in World War II, was shot down over Germany, and was a prisoner of war for two years. When he got out he went into education and became a professor of communications at Michigan State University. And from there he went on to oversee all the doctoral programs at Trinity Divinity School. After that he became the head of a missionary organization and traveled all over the world giving oversight to ministry. When I encountered him, he was the executive pastor of this church; he was in his 70s. I said to Gene, “I’m just so frustrated at this point in my life. I think I’m going to resign. I would be better off as a regular person serving here. I just can’t take this anymore.” And Gene leaned forward in his chair, looked me in the eye and said, “John, you can do that, but it will reflect how big or little of a man you are. How big of a man are you?” That surprised me. That conversation changed my character. Gene was challenging my character. God orchestrated that conversation and used Gene as a catalyst in my life. So I would like for you to take 10 – 15 minutes to reflect on the people God has used as catalysts in your life. Write them out. What are some of the catalysts that God has used in your life to transform your life?

As we focus on the question: “What does it mean to grow in Christ’s likeness?” let’s focus on how the catalysts on your list help to accomplish that goal. There is a wonderful book that I recommend by Andy Stanley entitled *Deep and Wide*. It describes the beginning of North Point church in Atlanta that Andy has started. They asked the question, “As we are spiritually forming people to be more like Christ, how do we go about that?” The book talks about creating an environment. Each of us is creating an environment around us that helps us to grow in our faith, which helps us to take steps of faith out of our comfort zone beyond where we are. The people of North Point church asked this question: “Is there something essential to every Christian that needs to happen in order for us to grow in Christ’s likeness?” **The essential ingredient to growth is faith**. The church decided faith was the most important thing they needed to work on to help believers grow in Christ’s likeness. Next they asked the question: “How can we create an environment that helps a person’s faith to grow deeper?” They discovered five catalysts. The first two are things that God does; he orchestrates these things to happen on our behalf for growth to occur. We are responsible for the later three. These are actions and actions are a key component of faith.

a. **Providential Relationships** – These are relationships that God brings to us unsolicited. These people speak into our life and help us to grow in our relationship with Christ. When God speaks into your life through other people, your faith grows.

Example: My relationship with Gene was a providential relationship. God orchestrated this relationship in order that I would grow in my faith.

Example: I also remember a time when I was in Atlanta needing to look for a job. At that time, two people came to me at different times and said, “I believe God has something for you at The Cove. I know you are serving at The Cove, but God has impressed it upon my heart that He has something for you and you need to be aware of that.”

**b. Pivotal Circumstances** – God builds around us pivotal circumstances. Wonderful things happen when you follow God’s leading.

Example: The fact that I am speaking to you today is a pivotal circumstance. God provided the providential relationship of Tom Mangham in my life. I did not know him before, but God placed upon his heart to contact me. I am here speaking to you today because of something God orchestrated: a pivotal circumstance. There was a need here and Tom contacted me to fill that need, so that I could share with you today. Part of this is “alignment” and we will talk about this further.

Example: Every year I ask God “Is there a theme for this year? Is there something you want to teach me, an area in which you want me to grow?” Last year, there were circumstances that came about, which challenged my family’s faith. We had to trust God. So the theme of last year was following God’s leading. We said, “God, orchestrate whatever you want us to do. Put that in front of us and allow us to see it. Orchestrate those opportunities.” And we found ourselves following God’s leading; and we are still living in this theme to some extent.

c. **Practical Teaching** – when you find yourself needing to be informed by the word of God, practical teaching is an essential part of growing your faith. As you read about men of faith, such as in Hebrews 11, you will see how God has grown their faith through seasons of testing. Practical Teaching is not just about information; it is about exposing yourself to the word of God. This teaching takes you to places where you take action steps of faith. They are practical steps. In this process, historically, insight has been a key aspect in the process of transformation. **Transformation begins with insight.** Insight often comes through practical teaching and the reading of the word of God, but it doesn’t necessarily cause growth. Faith allows you to take that information and respond to what God is telling you. The goal of spiritual formation is not the information that is being imparted to us by practical teaching, but the information that leads to our spiritual actions of faith.

Example: The goal of baseball is not to get to first base, but to get all around the bases and get back to home plate. Insight allows us to get to first base through practical teaching from the word of God. Faith helps us to move around the other bases and get back to home plate.

d. **Personal Ministry** – This is another way God forms our faith. As we engage in the understanding of our spiritual gifts, as we understand God’s calling upon our life, as we move towards those opportunities that he affords us, our faith is stretched. We grow in our faith and the expression of our faith as well.

1. Serving Others

2. Using Your Spiritual Gifts

3. Pursuing Your Calling – The word “calling” reminds me of an event at state fairs in the United States, where they put grease on a pig and you have to hold that pig down. The winner is the one who is able to grab the greased pig and hold onto it. But the greased pig usually gets away. That is how I used to feel about the word “calling”. “What is your calling?” I remember being asked that when I was in seminary and I remember thinking “I don’t know. It may be teaching. It may be counseling.” I wasn’t able to hold onto an understanding of what my calling was: it was like a greased pig to me. Since then, I have come to understand that all calling is found in the needs of others. **If you want to find your calling, expose yourself to the needs of other people because God will awaken in your gifts that you will need to use as you minister to the needs of other people. But not every need of another person constitutes a calling on your part.** Pay attention to those needs in others, which “stick to your back”. By that I mean when you walk away from that needy person, you find your mind still thinking about how you can help them. Pay attention to that; it is an essential part of your calling. **Also pay attention to the needs of others that “stick to your back” and then become a burden.** By burden I mean that you cannot walk away from that needy person without doing something for them. It is something you are compelled to do; to not do it would be wrong. You have a burden to respond to that person’s needs. **When you expose yourself to the needs of others that “stick to your back” and then become a burden, I will guarantee that you have found your calling.** **Calling in ministry is all about contribution.** What is your contribution to the lives of other people that helps make a difference in their lives? You have made a difference in their life; you have used your gift and followed your calling as a ministry to that person. Often times you find yourself drawn to a particular audience, or group of people. Seek to align your calling with the mission God has given you in life.

Example: You may find that your calling is with young people, or homeless people or single moms. It may be that you have a burden for missions.

Example: God has given me the calling of enabling others to think deeply, to choose wisely, to live Godly, and to intentionally cause others to do the same. With that understanding of what God has formed in me, it makes it a lot easier to know whether to respond to a need or not. So when Tom called me about teaching you. I asked myself, “Is this project part of my calling?” And I had to say, “Yes. It fits all of those areas of my calling.” Teaching like this in front of a camera takes me out of my comfort zone, but it is out of obedience to God and stepping out in faith. I pray that for you as well, that ministry will take you to places of deeper faith and those circumstances will be the catalyst that will grow your faith.

e. **Spiritual Disciplines** – These are the private disciplines that are the means of growth that God has given to us that help us to grow our faith as well.

1. **What are spiritual disciplines?** – The patterns that Jesus developed in his earthly life that helped him to stay connected to his Heavenly Father. These allowed him to experience the presence of God here on earth, which guided him and informed him of what he needed to do each day. In this process, **the spiritual disciplines are habits, sacred rhythms that help us to grow in Christ’s likeness.**

**2. How are habits formed? -** All of us have habits such as brushing teeth, exercise, taking vitamins, or going to bed at a certain time. **Habits help to form our character.** The spiritual disciplines are holy habits that are developed to help us form a relationship with our Heavenly Father just like Jesus did. **They are designed to bring joy into our relationship with God. Read Matthew 4 - 6.** There is a rhythm that happens in Jesus’ life that allows him to grow in his relationship with the Father.

**a.** Time Alone with The Father – Matthew 4 – Jesus is drawn into the wilderness. His intention is to meet with the Father, but the devil shows up while he is there. Jesus regularly draws away from people to spend time with the Father. He does this so that his Father will form his mission in life.

**b.** Investing in a Community of a Few - After Jesus’ time in the wilderness, he comes back and chooses the twelve disciples. These twelve become the community in which Jesus ministry is centered around. Spending time with the Father gives Jesus wisdom and moves him into a community with a few people. These few people are the ones into which Jesus invests and spends his time.

**c.** Public Ministry – The Sermon on the Mount is part of Jesus’ public ministry. As you read the gospels and study Jesus’ ministry, you will see these three habits displayed in Jesus’ life. You can see these holy habits in Jesus’ life that form is life and ministry here.

**3. When Jesus walked on earth and practiced these spiritual disciplines, what form did he take? –** Was he a spirit? Was he a body? Was he both? The spiritual disciplines help us to understand this. Jesus was fully divine and fully human: the “God-man”. As Jesus experienced these disciplines, he did so in a body and as a spirit. Jesus is both fully God and fully man. Why does this pertain to the spiritual disciplines?

a. Read 1 Corinthians 15:45 – Jesus is a life giving Spirit.

b. Read 1 Timothy 2:5 – Jesus is a man. Jesus does have a body. When he was on earth, he had an earthly body.

c. Gnosticism – This is a heresy that denied Jesus ever having a body. It said the body contributes to sin, so Jesus couldn’t have a body. He was a disembodied spirit. It denied Jesus’ humanity. This is not correct.

d. We as humans have a body and a spirit. We are primarily embodied spirits, spirits that happen to have bodies. What you believe about this affects how you live your life. If you are a body with a spirit then you believe your body needs to grow but your spirit does not. If you believe you are a spirit with a body, you believe your spirit needs to grow as well as your body. This is what the spiritual disciplines help us to do. They help us as embodied spirits to grow our spirit in the body towards Christ’s likeness. You cannot have a disembodied spirit. In that case you are not alive. When we are here on earth, we are always embodied spirits. Our goal on earth is to shape our spirits in Christ’s likeness, so that our spirits yield to God. In this process, our bodies do play an important part.

4. **What part does our body play in this process?**

a. Read Romans 12:1 – body expressing spiritual worship. Our bodies are given to us so that we can “do”. Our spirits, our character is the “being” side of us. Faith requires action. Our bodies express faith in God; they take a step of action, to move us toward Christ’s likeness.

b. Do we have bodies in Heaven? – Yes they are glorified bodies. Faith helps us to grow through the use of our bodies.

Spiritual disciplines are the conditioning program of spiritual athletes. As we grow in faith, we are conditioning ourselves through the spiritual disciplines to grow in Christ-like character. The spiritual disciplines help us to overcome evil, sin, and temptation in this life; and to grow our greater Christ-like character and grow in our faith. Now that we have looked at the big picture of spiritual disciplines, next time we will look at the individual disciplines. We will also talk about how to select spiritual disciplines that will help you the most.

It has been a delight to be with you. I trust you have enjoyed our time as well and have been stretched a little bit. I always enjoy the conversation of spiritual growth and transformation. It reminds me of a swimming pool. It is a place where it is shallow enough for a baby to play but also deep enough for an elephant to sink. I hope this has been shallow and deep for you, in order that you may grow in your faith and your Christ-likeness as well. I look forward to future conversations with you.

**Think about the following questions:**

1. What is one idea, concept or quote that has captured your attention in this session? Why? What captivated you?
2. Do you find yourself resisting anything from this session? If so, why are you resisting that particular concept or idea?
3. What is one question that comes to your mind from this session? Is there something that you would like to explore further?
4. Read Hebrews 11. Think about the kind of faith these historical people had.
5. Read Matthew 4 – 6. Write down the sacred rhythms of Jesus’ life from those passages.