

Class 1: Why Spiritual Formation? What Is Spiritual Formation?

Why Spiritual Formation Is Important

1. We're meant for this individually and corporately (John 10:10, Ephesians 4:11–13, Galatians 4:19).
2. It's totally possible (2 Peter 3:18; VIM: Vision, Intention, and Means).
3. God calls us into it (Matthew 28:18–20)
 - In Scripture, being sanctified is both a past and present experience. The Greek word for sanctification—*hagiazō*—is mentioned 28x in the NT (12 past, 9 perfect, 7 present).
 - 1 Thessalonians 5:23.
 - NRSV: "May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."
 - NIV: "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

What Is Spiritual Formation?

"Spiritual Formation" is the process by which God forms us as we participate in his divine nature through the disciplines, which involve heart and body.

The Parts God Forms: Deuteronomy 6:4–9

1. Hebrew. Key verse: Deuteronomy 6:4–9.
 - Spirit: *lavav*
 - Spirit in the Bible is *pneuma* or *ruach* (wind, spirit, breath, or movement).
 - Spirit, according to Willard is "unembodied, personal power" (*Spirit* p. 64). Non personal power is electricity, gravity, and magnetism.
 - Body: *nefesh*, soul, embodied being
 - Defining *nefesh* (Genesis 1:21, 24): "*nefesh hayah*" is used for fish, birds, animals. See also Genesis 2:7.
 - Leviticus 17:11: *nefesh* is the blood: "For *the life* of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for *yourselves* on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for *one's life*."
2. Greek. Key Verse: Matthew 22:37: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."
3. How spiritual formation happens (Philippians 2:12–13; *Renovation of the Heart*, page 41 at the very bottom).

Class 2: Barriers to Spiritual Formation and How Spiritual Formation Works

Your Greatest Desire

Donald Miller simply defines story as "A character who wants something and overcomes barriers to get it."

How to determine what you want right now:

1. Be willing to admit what you want, honestly.
2. Start by listing out the desires you have the come to your mind.
3. Then, land on the primary one. You can use the sheet to do this.

Barriers to Spiritual Formation

How to identify yours:

1. Be willing to dig deep.
2. Begin by listing out different barriers that come to mind as you think or pray.
3. Then, pick one surface-level and one deep barrier that create the greatest challenge for you connecting with God.

Common Surface Barriers

1. Surface: Busyness. Forgetfulness. Not making plans to do it. Not having a clear goal. Not disciplined. Don't know how to do it. It's not enjoyable.
2. Deep

General

- Forgiveness-only gospel.
- Gnostic gospel.
- Skewed view of sovereignty.
- Fear of legalism.
- We don't believe it's possible.

Personal: Sin. Guilt. Shame. Selfish motives. We don't believe we can do it.

How Spiritual Formation Works (40 minutes)

A. God's Part

1. God's heart is strong and willing to bring us into it.
 - He has a strong will: Matthew 8:1–3.
 - *Henosis*: John 17:20–21.
2. God gives us his heart/spirit/will

- A new heart: Ezek 36:26.
- A strong heart: Ephesians 3:16–17.
- An energized heart: Philippians 2:12–13.

B. Our Part

1. The solution to our general barriers: To believe in the good news about Jesus.
 - Problem: Gnostic gospel. Solution: Kingdom gospel.
 - Problem: Forgiveness-only gospel. Solution: Enthronement now.
 - Problem: Fear of legalism. Solution: Embracing the necessity of good works and the goodness of pleasing God.
 - Skewed view of sovereignty. Philippians 2:12–13.
 - Good works. Ephesians 2:10.
 - Pleasing God. 1 Thessalonians 4:1.
2. The solution to our personal challenges: To receive God's words of identity over us.
 - Sin. You are "free" (Gal. 5:1).
 - Guilt. You are "holy ones": We are declared holy ones at the beginning of at least 6 letters: Romans, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Corinthians, and 2 Corinthians.
 - Shame. You are my "treasured possession" (Exodus 19:4–6).
 - Selfish motives. You are "loved" (Matt. 3:16).

An issue of the heart. It starts with deciding to do something in your spirit.

- Matthew 5:48: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."
- Deuteronomy 6: "Love God with *all* your heart, soul, and muchness."
- Jeremiah 29:13: "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."

The Role of Effort: Make Every Effort!

"Make every effort":

- Jesus and *agonizomai* in Luke 13:22-24.
- Paul and *dioko* in Romans 14:19.
- Hebrews and *dioko* in Hebrews 12:14.
- Peter and *spoude*. 2 Peter 1:5-7.

The Role of the Mind

- Paul talks about mind and body in Romans 12:2

The Role of the Body

- Romans 12:1; Spirit and flesh: Matt 26:41.

C. Their Part

- Ephesians 4:15–16; Colossians 1:28–29; 1 Corinthians 3:8–9.

Class 3: Solitude and Silence

Introduction

The Kinds of Disciplines

Disciplines of Abstinence

- Solitude
- Silence
- Fasting
- Frugality
- Chastity
- Secrecy
- Sacrifice

Disciplines of Engagement

- Study
- Worship
- Celebration
- Service
- Prayer
- Fellowship
- Confession
- Submission
- Meditation
- Guidance

The goal.

The goal of solitude and silence is to hear God. Example of the boy Samuel from 1 Samuel 3:1–11.

Solitude

Why Is Solitude Important for Us?

1. We need it, and it works.
2. Jesus did it, so it should be who we are.
 - Examples throughout Scripture: Joseph, David, Paul, Elijah, and John.
 - Jesus did this at big moments:
 - To inaugurate his ministry for 40 days (Matthew and Luke 4).

- Before he chose his disciples (Luke 6:12).
- He did this regularly and randomly too: Mark 1:35; Luke 5:15-16; John 6:15.
- 3. Christians throughout history have done this: St. Teresa of Avila, St. Benedict and the monastic traditions, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Thomas Merton, and spiritual leaders today.

So let's normalize solitude!

Solitude is...

- Regular times we get alone to be with God.
- Extended retreats that offer special time with God.

How to Be Alone

1. Make plans for both regular solitude and annual retreats.
 - Practice daily, scheduled quiet time.
 - Regularly retreat into solitude for extended time alone
2. Make preparations.
 - Block out your schedule and don't schedule anything for retreats: at least 3 full days for really going deep. I suggest blocking out 4–5, including travel.
 - Be really clear with people as best you can about why you're doing this.
 - Turn everything off as completely as possible.
 - Pray about it before, asking God to lead you, prepare your heart, and if he wants you to do something specific.
3. Enjoy this time with God to the max.
 - Make rituals and monuments of significant moments.
 - Allow your body to rest before you do the hard work.
 - Listen to your intuitions and feel free to do as you see fit.
 - Get obsessive about something and go deep.
 - Allow the retreat to bleed into the rest of life.

Silence

Why is this important?

1. It's a command, so we should obey.
 - Helps us know God: Psalm 46:10.
 - Gives us salvation and strength: Isaiah 30:15–16.
 - Trains us for righteousness: James 1:19–20.
2. Jesus did it, so it should be who we are.
 - Before the high priest in his trial: Mark 14:60–61.
 - Before Pilate during his trial: John 19:8–10.
3. It works, so we should do it.

Benefits:

- To hear from God.
- Certain breakthroughs don't happen otherwise.
- Life change.
- Heart transformation.
- Helps bring peace in place of anxiety.
- Leads to joy.
- Helps us become righteous, kind, and wise (Prov. 10:19).

Barriers

Why is finding silence hard?

1. So much noise!
2. Excuses we make to ourselves.
3. Practical challenges: just getting away.

How to find silence.

1. Identify the noise in your life.
2. Make decisions.
3. Make plans and consistently follow through.
4. Ask for accountability.
5. How will you know if you succeeded in this?

Class 4: Rest

My goal today

To convince you to restore a day of rest in your life by taking an entire, continuous 24-hour period each week, ideally Sunday, to stop working and do three things: Gather together, pray together, and talk about the Bible together—all to connect with God together.

My summary of the argument goes like this:

- It was a command in the Old Testament that was fulfilled and given its full purpose by Jesus for the New Covenant.
- It has many spiritual benefits for us, our families, and our churches
- It's a general practice embraced by the early church and Christians throughout the millennia—to set one day aside from the others to rest and seek God with the people of God.

Mark Moore: "If you can't accomplish everything you need to do in twelve hours a day six days a week, you're trying to please someone other than God."

Why should we practice a day of rest?

1. There's a strong biblical precedent to the discipline of rest which Jesus doesn't abolish but fulfills in the New Covenant
2. It was redefined by the early church but was their new way of life, so we should be like them in this practice.
3. It's a gift to receive, not a law to scrutinize.

1. It has a biblical precedent as a command, which Jesus doesn't abolish but fulfills for his disciples.

A. Old Testament, it was one of the 10 commandments, so we know that rest is important to God.

- Matthew 5:17–18
- It's rooted in redemption: Deuteronomy 5:12–15. - It's like in John 1:1
 - Sabbath is not just ceasing work; it's also actively pursuing God.
- It's rooted in creation: Exodus 31:14–17.
- See also Exodus 16:23–30, the very first time we hear about Sabbath.

B. Jesus fulfills the Sabbath, and shows us what it means to have a day of rest for us as disciples.

- Sabbath is used 68 total times in the New Testament:
 - 56x in the Gospels, Luke 20 of those times.
 - 10x in Acts.
 - Only 2x in the letters: 1 Cor. 16:2 and Colossians 2:16.

- Jesus' men ate grain on the Sabbath: Matthew 12:1–14 // Mark 2:23–27
 - Taking someone else's grain was not wrong according to Deuteronomy 23:25. - Oral tradition in the Mishnah, Shabbat 7:2. - David and Ahimelech, 1 Samuel 21:1–6 (with Leviticus 24:9).
 - The work of priests in Numbers 28:9–10. - The prophet's words in Hosea 6:4–6.

It was redefined by the early church but was their new way of life, so we should be like them in this practice.

A. The New Testament writers don't totally dismiss a day of rest, but assume it (like fasting and other disciplines).

- Colossians 2:13–17.
- 1 Cor. 16:1–2.

B. The early church did it and Christians throughout history have done it.

- Now, it's very clear that the early church did not obey the Jewish Sabbath:
 - Acts 20:7 "On the first day of the week we came together to break bread."
 - Didache 14 [A.D. 70].
 - Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Magnesians* 8 [A.D. 110].
 - Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 67 [A.D. 155].
 - Athanasius, *On Sabbath and Circumcision* 3 [A.D. 345].
 - Council of Laodicea, *Canon* 29 [A.D. 360].

3. It's a gift to receive, not a law to scrutinize.

So what do we actually do on this day?

- What they did on the Sabbath in Acts: I did a survey of the book of Acts, and I found that the people of God in the time of Jesus did three things: they gathered together, debated the Torah, and prayed together.
- How do we do this?
 1. Make specific plans for a day of rest each week.
 2. Prepare for a day of rest by saying "no."
 3. Say yes to connecting with God through prayer, his Word, and his people.

Class 5: Study

Introduction

My goal today

My goal today is to help you know how to dig a deep well into God's Word, one you can draw from for the rest of your life, by learning to enjoy God in his Word.

A Biblical Theology of the Word

The Story

- In creation, God spoke the world into existence. Genesis 1:1.
- In the Exile, God's Word was intended to be internalized. Ezekiel 3:1–3.
- In ruin, God's Word has power to make dead people live. Ezek 37:1–7.
- In temptation, God's Word is sustenance. Matthew 4:4.
- In pastoral training, God's Word is useful. 2 Timothy 3:16–17.
- In our hearts, God's Word pierces. Hebrews 4:12.
- In sanctification, God's Word cleanses. Ephesians 5:25–26.
- In spiritual battle, God's Word is our weapon to fight. Ephesians 6:17.
- At the Second Coming, God's Word defeats our enemy. Revelation 19:13.
- "But you did not *learn Christ* that way" (Ephesians 4:20).

The Word and the Bible

- The Bible contains the Word of God, but God's Word, according to the Bible, is not simply the written words on the page. It's the reality of what God has said, which the Bible contains.
- What is the Bible? Many people see the Bible as a love letter, which is true. But it's more than that, and embracing this reality is vital.
- It's also political treatise, history, poetry, apocalypse, book of advice, parables, chronicles, biographies, prophecy, and More.
- It's inspired and sacred.

Problem: Barriers

The main problem is that we struggle to enjoy the Word and find life in it. Why is this?

- Lack of vision; Knowledge; Tools; Content overload; Boredom; Laziness; Obligation.
- Approach. We want to get something out of it. God wants something out of you! This comes in a few common forms:
 - Medicine chest reading.
 - Bible roulette.
 - Grazing reading.

- Texts in systematic sequences.
- Reading to teach.

Solution: Enjoy the Word.

The analogy for this is of digging a well vs. getting a quick drink.

This happens by saturation in the Word. There's a name for this: *Lectio Divina*, which is divine reading. Isaiah 66:2.

Do the Essentials

ABCs

1. All of the Bible, read it once: 90 days, 1 year.
 - Bible reading plans: 3 months (*NIV Bible in 90 Days*) or 1 year plan.
 - Resource: The Story of the Kingdom.
2. Book study, learn to do it
 - Resource: The attached step-by-step sheet that tells you exactly how to do it.
 - *Grasping God's Word*, Duvall and Hayes. A solid introduction to hermeneutics.
 - *Inductive Bible Study*, David R. Bauer and Robert Traina. An introduction to the Inductive Bible Study method.
 - William Barclay's *Daily Study Bible* (available also free online: <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/dsb>)
 - Tom Wright's *For Everyone* Series
3. Concentrated study.
 - Meditation as relaxed *Lectio Divina*.
 - Psalm 1.
 - Resource: Michael Casey's *Sacred Reading*
 - Resource: Eugene Peterson's *Eat This Book*
 - My recommended memory verses: Genesis 12:1-3; Exodus 19:4-6; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Joshua 1:9; Psalm 1; Psalm 23; Proverbs 3:5-6; Isaiah 61; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Matthew 5-7; Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 15:1-32; John 10:10; John 13-17; Acts 20; 2 Peter 1:3-11
4. Discovery study.
 - Resource: The Discovery Bible Study notebook.
5. Every Psalm.
 - Resource: The Psalm Sheet.
 - Resource: *Praying the Psalms*, Thomas Merton

Conclusion

- Revelation 2:1-7

Class 6: Prayer

Introduction

Our sanctification results in life (Romans 6:22).

Introducing Prayer

The goal today: that you would be able to understand and use the Lord's Prayer as a framework for daily prayer to help you connect with God

1. Understand prayer as union, not utility.
2. Acknowledge barriers to prayer.
3. Know how to pray the Our Father Prayer as a framework for daily prayer.

Why Pray?

1. It's a command. Psalm 55:16.
2. It works.
3. It's what God's people do.
 - Moses in Exodus 33:15–18.
 - David in 1 Sam. 13:14 (see also Acts 13:22).
 - Jesus in John 17 and Matt. 26:39

Barriers to Prayer

How to Pray

- Our Example: Jesus' Life of Prayer (see sheet).
- Luke 5:16.

Our Instructions: The Our Father Prayer (Matthew 6:9–13)

Exegesis of the Prayer

- **Our Father in heaven.**
 - Jeremiah 3:19–20
 - See article, The Biblical Meaning of "Abba," and It's Not Daddy
 - "In heaven." See *The Divine Conspiracy* book by Dallas Willard, page 48 for the meaning "in the heavens."
 - Jesus throughout his life.
- **Your name be holy.**
 - Jesus in John 17:4
- **Your kingdom come.**
 - Jesus in Mark 1:15; 1:35.
- **Your will be done.**

- Jesus in Gethsemani.
- **On earth as it is in heaven.**
- **Give us today our daily bread.**
 - Jesus before feeding the 5,000 and during the Last Supper.
- **Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.**
 - Literal debt: Exodus 22:24; Leviticus 25:36-37; Deuteronomy 23:19.
 - Debt as metaphor for sin: Matthew 18:22.
 - Jesus in Luke 23:34.
- **Lead us not into the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.**
 - James 1:12–14.
 - God tests his people (Abraham in Genesis 22, Israel in the desert).
 - Jesus
 - His own prayer in Gethsemani.
 - His exhortation in Gethsemani to his disciples (Mark 14:38).
 - Jesus in the desert (Matthew 4; Luke 4) - Test case for “time of trial”: Luke 22:28–34.
- **Rescue us from the evil one.**
 - Every other time the word “the” is used in front of evil in the Greek New Testament, 80% of the time 24 of 30 times, it’s an evil person (Satan or another person) and the other five times it’s an evil thing, never evil in general. Note: *Of the 30 times it's used with a definite article, five are about evil things (Mark 7:23 evil things; Rom 12:9 the evil thing; Eph 6:13 evil day; Col 1:21 evil deeds; 2 John 11 evil deeds) and the rest are talking about an evil person (Satan or another person;). So evil is not a choice, leaving either an evil thing or person.*

Takeaways from the Our Father Prayer

1. Comprehensiveness.
2. Alignment.
3. God is the greatest object of prayer (Luke 11:11–13)

Class 7: Fasting

What keeps us from Fasting?

- It's hard work—and painful!
- We're afraid of legalism because it's intense work.
- We don't talk about it, so we don't have a good framework for it.
- As Americans, our mindset toward food is off base.
- We don't know how to do it based on Scripture.
- We struggle to believe that it's better than eating.
- We've separated our bodies from our spiritual walk.

Theology of the Body: The Importance and Role of the Body in Spiritual Formation

- The incarnation places value on the body.
- A fuller theology of the body:
 - Matt 6:25; 1 Cor. 6:13, 19–20; see also Rom 12:1–2.
 - Dallas Willard substantiates the importance of the body: *Renovation of the Heart*, pages 165–166.
 - So our bodies are meant to serve us, not us serve it (1 Cor. 9:27; 1 Tim 4:7–8)
 - Dallas Willard quote from *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, page 152.

What Is Fasting?

- Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, page 160.

Why Fast?

1. It helps us grow spiritually.

- Teresa of Avila quote from *Interior Castle*, page 47.
- Teaches us general physical restraint.
- Can lead to spiritual breakthroughs.
- Can intensify other disciplines.

2. Is it a command?

- To the best of my knowledge, no, but leaders sometimes call us to it (e.g., Ezra 8:21; Joel 1:14; 2:15; Jeremiah 36:8).

3. It's what we do.

- Fasting in the Old Testament
 - Moses (Deuteronomy 9:9)
 - David (2 Sam 12:15–17)
 - Esther (Esther 4:16)

- Elijah (1 Kings 19:8)
- Nehemiah 9:1–3 (see also Daniel 9:1–5; Jonah 3:5; and Leviticus 23:32)
- Fasting in the life of Jesus.
 - Matthew 4
 - Dallas Willard in *The Spirit of the Disciplines* page 53.
- Fasting in the early church.
 - Early church and Paul’s fast (Acts 13:2–3; Acts 14:23; Acts 9:9).

How to Fast?

- Issues of the heart when fasting (Isaiah 58:3, 6–9; Zech. 7:9–10; Matthew 6:16–18).
- The timing of our fast. (Matt. 9:14–15; Zechariah 7:2–6; see also Zech. 8:19). *Didache*, Chapter 8.2

Advice

- Do it regularly and consistently.
- Do it slowly—ease into it.
- Do it literally—no food, just water (unless medically you can't do this).
- Do it incrementally longer.
- Do it intentionally for specific things.
- Do it in community.

Resources

- *Revival Starts Here* by Dave Clayton
- *The Spirit of the Disciplines* by Dallas Willard
- *Celebration of Discipline* by Richard Foster

Notes

1. Dallas Willard makes this note in *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 17.
2. *Didache*, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/didache-roberts.html>

Class 8 Notes: Service, Submission, and Confession

Introduction

Today's Class Session

- Jerry Bridges, in his book *The Blessing of Humility* counted some 50 times love is mentioned and some 40 times humility is mentioned.
- It's like what C. S. Lewis said in *Mere Christianity* about becoming more loving: "Do not waste time bothering whether you 'love' your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him. If you injure someone you dislike, you will find yourself disliking him more" (131).

Service

- Jeremiah 9:23–24: "the Lord, who practices kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight.
- Matthew 25:31–46.
- Six ways to serve people physically:
 - Give food to the Hungry
 - Give drink to the Thirsty
 - Welcome the Stranger
 - Clothe the Naked
 - Visit the Sick
 - Visit the Imprisoned
- Ash Barker's book *Make Poverty Personal: Taking the Poor as Seriously as the Bible Does*.
- Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert's book *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor . . . and Yourself*

Submission

It starts with this: God has all authority

- Genesis 1:28, God put man to rule creation
- Revelation 22:4-5; see also, Rev. 5:10.
- Jesus displays the authority of God for us:
 - People said he spoke with authority: Mark 1:22.
 - Authority and Centurion's Servant healing: Luke 7:8.
 - His disciples said, "The demons submit to us in your name" (Luke 10:17).
 - Read Matthew 4–9 with Jesus' total authority in mind.

The Seven Authorities under whom we're called to submit:

1. God himself: James 4:7: "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." See also 1 Peter 2:13.
2. Church leaders: Hebrews 13:17: "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. . ."
3. Other believers: Ephesians 5:21 "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."
4. Our spouse: Ephesians 5:22–25: "22 Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. 23. . . . 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless."
 - **Reversal of the Fall.** Genesis 3:16, "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."
5. Parents: Ephesians 6:1: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right."
6. Employer: Ephesians 6:5–9: "Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. . . ."
7. Governmental authorities: Romans 13:1–5: "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. . . ."

Jesus said to Pilate, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above" (John 19:11, ESV).

Confession

Why is confession important?

1. It brings healing: James 5:13–16: ". . . 16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."
 - Elijah in 1 Kings 17 with James 5:17–20
2. We rid sin of its power. Sin grows in darkness.
3. When we confession we can more tangibly experience the grace and mercy of God to forgive us—and still be in the same room.

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9) to remind each other of truth.

How do we do this?

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer: "He who himself lives beneath the Cross" (*Life Together*, 119).
- Bonhoeffer writes about two dangers in *Life Together* (page 120): 1) The person who only hears confessions from others and doesn't confess for themselves, and 2) The second danger is when we confess, we think that our piety is what brings healing. It's God who forgives, absolves our sin, and heals us. When we turn it into a pious work we do and

forget God's grace in it, it becomes lifeless. **The effectiveness of our confession is based on our promise from God not based on our piety to God.**