

## Christian Spiritual Formation – The Way of Faithful Following

Nancy J. Kane, L.C.P.C.  
www.thecaritascenter.com

“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his suffering becoming like him in his death and so somehow to attain to the resurrection of the dead.”

Philippians 3:10

We were created to intimately know the love of God and share that love with the entire world. All things were created towards this end. With all the people in the world that profess to be followers of Christ it is puzzling why the world is not dramatically different. Some propose, the root of the problem is our failure to become what we actually profess.

We can know much about God and His word yet never really encounter God Himself. Throughout the Scriptures we see that whenever a man or woman truly encountered God they were changed. Yet, what does this ongoing process look like? How do we grow in holiness, intimacy with God and godly character across the span of our whole life? What is the process of Christian spiritual formation?

In Isaiah 6 we see Isaiah ushered before the throne of God. Upon encountering God, Isaiah was undone by his sin. Immediately, the angels placed burning coals on his tongue to cleanse Him. He then hears God calling for messengers and Isaiah cries out, “Send me!”. Isaiah saw who He was in light of God’s holiness, was purified and then desires to share the knowledge of God to the world. Here we see the full process of transformation.

For the sake of definition, Christian spiritual formation is the intentional process of God forming our inner lives, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to be shaped into the character of Christ, leading us to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and loving one’s neighbor as oneself (Matt. 22:37) It is the transformation of our entire being, heart, soul, body and mind that God awakens us to what needs to be changed. There are many components that assist in the process of spiritual formation: prayer, Bible reading, spiritual disciplines to name a few. There are a couple of key factors in this process that are worth highlighting.

### **Prayerful Self-Reflection**

Prayerful self-reflection is a significant aspect of formation. Most of us live lives with a great deal of unawareness. As we dwell before Christ, prayerfully reflecting on His word, God shines His light into our hearts and we see, more clearly than daylight, the areas of our lives that God wants to touch and transform. As we come to know Christ we must also increase in our understanding of ourselves.

Augustine addressed this when he wrote in Confessions, “How can you draw close to God when you are far from your own self?” “Grant, Lord, that I may know myself that I may know thee.” Later in church history, John Calvin (1530) affirmed this when he wrote, “Our wisdom. . .

consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But as these are connected together by many ties, it is not easy to determine which of the two precedes and gives birth to the other.” Paul longed for the believers in Galatia that Christ would be formed in them (Galatians 4:12).

In self-reflection, we ask “search me O God and know my heart. Try me and test my thoughts.” (Psalm 139:23) We dialogue with Him our concerns, questions and musings. We allow the Lord to examine our hearts, in conjunction with His gentle guidance, giving us direction, awakening us to what is not pleasing to Him, and strengthening us to more fully serve.

### **Solitude and Silence**

Periods of solitude are foundational as well. Many of us live such busy lives we barely have enough time for our own thoughts. When we are still, our minds race to a thousand different places and distractions. Thoughts that we have successfully pushed away in our busyness come rushing back to haunt us. God longs for our attention and affection. He promises, “In returning [to Me] and rest you shall be saved, In quietness and confident trust is your strength.” (Isaiah 30:15)

As we carve out small moments, like bringing before God our few crumbs of bread, we find God teaching us how to dwell with Him and be with Him. Like sitting with a long-trusted, faithful companion, we find our souls starting to quiet and enter into a place of peace. We will find the byproduct being our lives become less harried, more focused and directed by the Holy Spirit’s leading.

Marian Scheele expresses the intimacy of dwelling with God. She explains, “As we obey the call (to dwell with Him), we discover that it is God Himself who not only invites us into the place of infinite delight, but has sent the Holy Spirit to make everything possible. Taking His hand, we walk with Him into the vast, silent regions of the heavens, and our speech is hushed because we realize that we have nothing to say. Job spoke many words of wisdom in his conversation with his friends, but when he saw God, there was an enormous silence.”

“It is an awesome thing to come into the presence of the living God. But, incredibly, this place of holiness is surprisingly familiar. Somehow, we feel that we have come home. Our nothingness is not a thing to be ashamed of. In our eager, childlike searching, we have come to a place where we are welcomed, forgiven, tenderly comforted. Someone is saying, ‘Come in! I have been waiting for you!’”<sup>1</sup>

May our hearts greatest desire be to know the breadth, and depth and height of the love of God (Eph. 3:18) and be so transformed that others may desire to know Him as well.

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.tentmaker.org/articles/TheFaceofChrist.html>