

Spiritual Formation Through History

Description: A look at spiritual formation defined through a historical approach with certain key topics from church history that aid us in our understanding of the life and practice of the Way of Jesus.

Outline:

Wk1 Definition:

We will define spiritual formation and explain its key components and how they fit in an historical understanding. We will also look at key figures throughout history as “landmarks” of spiritual formation. Trace our own cultural, denominational heritage, which includes conversion, Reformers (word), Pioneer missions, and what I believe to be a failure of discounting anything pre-Reformation.

Wk2 Martyrdom/Ascetism

We will look at the early Christian martyrs and how a life defined by martyrdom was essential for early Christian spirituality. We will also investigate the legalisation of and cultural transition to Christianity during Constantine’s reign and the concept of “white” and “red” martyrdom. Key figures here are Polycarp, Perpetua, Sadhu Sigh, and Antony of Alexandria

Wk3 Rhythm of Monasticism

Looking at the way rhythms impact our life, especially in the retraining of the soul. We “try to train” in the spiritual life. Discussion of the practical rhythms we can put into place. Rhythms of prayer: reading/memorizing the Psalms, prayer books, The Ignatian Way, viewing Sunday morning through the lens of rhythms. Key figures: St. Benedict. Key Books: *The Monkhoo of All Believers* by Greg Peters

Wk4 Icons & Saints

We explore the nature of spiritual role models, especially of those that have passed on before us. We engage with story and remembrance of them. Including a discussion of the 7th Ecumenical Council of Nicaea. Discussion of Old Testament Saints and how through story we can see spiritual formation come alive. Narrative as a tool for virtue, character, and formation in Christ. Discuss icons—their use and function in spiritual life both literal definition and figurative definition of icons. Key figures: Abraham, Naaman, Esther, Ruth, Mary of Bethany, etc.

Wk5 Mysticism & The Dark Night

Engage with the idea of mystery and silence. Discuss the use and place of apophatic theology in our daily practice. Discussing the “ascent to Christ” and what the process of deification entails. Define Beatific Vision and the nature of a 2nd personal relationship. Discuss the Difference between acquired wisdom and infused wisdom. Discuss the book *Cloud of Unknowing* and the “Jesus Prayer” as relevant practices. Key figures: Pseudo-Dionysius, Aquinas, St. Teresa of Avila, Julian of Norwich, and Thomas Merton.

Booklist: *Ascent to Truth*, *Interior Castle*,

How experience, emotion, and feeling are included in spiritual formation. The necessity of finding God in the Dark Night. The dangers of desiring a transactional relationship with God. The confusion of the Dark Night. The spiritual gluttony of believers. The union that arrives through knowing the Giver instead of the gifts.

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1 Hour in Prayer

"So, could you not watch with me one hour?"

Matthew 26:40

General Idea:

Quality matters in prayer! We want our prayers to be intentional and full of substance. However, the quantity of time in prayer may be overlooked sometimes. What we find is that our souls take time to quiet down and, once they do, prayer takes a dramatic turn deeper.

What it is not:

It is not a legalistic requirement or a magical formula. Spending an hour in prayer will not magically fix your life or give you a specific experience with God. It is simply a way to remain in prayer.

Helpful tips:

- I find it helpful to set a timer on my phone for one hour, put my phone on silent, and then place it out of reach. This allows me to not worry about how much time has passed and simply to remain with God.
- When, not if, you find your mind wandering, do not violently scold yourself, but rather gently bring your attention back to God and to the prayer prompt. However, if there is something specific distracting your mind, bring that thing before the Lord in prayer.
- Journaling is often helpful if you find that you need something to help focus your prayer. However, this can be used as a cover for you to hide behind sitting in silence and so just watch your soul in this.

Specific Prayer Focuses:

- **Wk 1:** How has your soul been "trained" in the spiritual life without God? What disconnects do you have in your mind between God Concept (Who you know God to be i.e. Patient) and God Image (unconscious false beliefs about God i.e. impatient)
- **Wk 2:** How is your life guided by a desire for comfort? How do you see comfort as an enemy in your spiritual life? How is God inviting you to become a "bloodless martyr?"
- **Wk 3:** What rhythms are in your life (spiritual or otherwise)? Investigate them with God and see how they are training/retraining your soul. Sit with God in silence and ask what rhythms he might be inviting you to adopt in your life?
- **Wk 4:** What stories/people have shaped your understanding of spiritual life? What are sacred things in your life that serve as icons to remind you of God and the reality of spiritual life?
- **Wk 5:** How has the desire for experience or emotion shaped your spiritual life? Attempt to sit in silence with God. This is not a removal of thought or words, but rather a commitment to remain with God without the need to perform in prayer or use an abundance of words.

Wk1 Definition of Spiritual Formation

We will define spiritual formation and explain its key components and how they fit in an historical understanding. We will also look at key figures throughout history as “landmarks” of spiritual formation. Trace our own cultural, denominational heritage, which includes conversion, Reformers (word), Pioneer missions, and what I believe to be a failure of discounting anything pre-Reformation.

Definition of Spiritual Formation (SF): SF is the intentional retraining of the whole person into the Life of Blessedness in Union with Christ

“Intentional” = Why do we sin when we know so much? (Colossians 3)

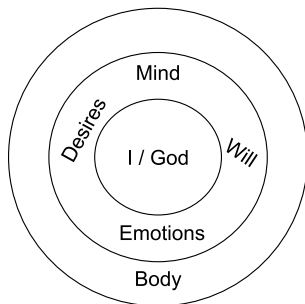
“Retraining” = We have all been trained and formed spiritually

God Concept (Conscious)	God Image (Unconscious)
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Jesus said, “Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation.” (Matthew 26:41)

“The beginner must think of himself as of one setting out to make a garden in which the Lord is to take His delight, yet in soil most unfruitful and full of weeds. His Majesty uproots the weeds and will set good plants in their stead.” (Teresa of Avila, The Life of Teresa of Jesus, 127)

“The Whole Person” = Body & Soul



“The Life of Blessedness” = flourishing life

³⁷ On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ ” ³⁹ Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive,

John 7:37–39 (ESV)

³ He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. ⁴ The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. ⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; ⁶ for the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

Psalms 1:3–6 (ESV)

Future: See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. ³ And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

1 John 3:1–3 (ESV)

“In Union with Christ” = Participating in Christ’s work that he did that we could not do

¹⁴ Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

Hebrews 2:14–15 (ESV)

Story of David | Better Moses (Hebrews 3:1-6) | Jesus’ Temptation in the Wilderness

³ His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, ⁴ by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

2 Peter 1:3–4 (ESV)

Why History? The Spirit takes the general commands of Scriptures and trains those who surrender to him. They teach others . . . and us. We have seen through history and the building of a magnificent structure brick upon brick. We see this with all theology, but especially concerning the spiritual life.

All Truth is God’s Truth