

Practicing the Way Series

The Holy Spirit

By JOHN MARK COMER

Spiritual Formation Recap

Spiritual formation is the process by which we are formed into the image of Jesus — to grow and mature into the man (or woman) that God had in mind when he created humanity in the first place.

And spiritual formation is not just a Christian thing; it's a human thing — to be human means that we are constantly being shaped and formed every moment of every day. We are all a disciple or an apprentice of somebody or something. This question is NOT are you a disciple or an apprentice; the question is who or what are you a disciple or an apprentice of? **We are all being formed and shaped just by waking up and living our normal life (unintentionally).** The only real question is who or what are we being shaped into.

We have a part to play in our discipleship to Jesus. It takes effort. It takes effort to live in any relationship in your life and that includes your relationship to God. You have a part to play in your transformation. You have a responsibility and a role to play, and God has a role that he plays. God plays the bigger part for sure but that does not negate your responsibility to put forth the effort to play your part.

We play our part by immersing ourselves in the teaching of Jesus, implementing the practices of Jesus and living in community with other disciples of Jesus. BUT all of these things are to be done in the context of being aware of and connected to the Holy Spirit.

Human Free Will

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

— 2 Corinthians 3:17-18

“One of the things that makes us human (that separates us from the animals) is our will.”

— John Mark Comer

- First Order Desires (“*the flesh*”) — base animal-like desires (for food, sleep, sex, safety, dominance)
- Second Order Desires — higher human desires to want to want something better
- **Second Order Volition** — the ability to exercise your will power to override your First Order Desires for your Second Order Desires

“[Free will] is freedom to do what one wants to do. Analogously, then, the statement that a person enjoys freedom of the will means... that he is free to want what he wants to want. More, precisely, it means that he is free to will what he wants to will... It is in securing the conformity of his will to his second-order volitions, then, that a person exercises freedom of the will.”

— Harry Frankfurt

Contrary to the way our culture and society says today, true freedom is not the freedom to just do whatever you want — to just give in to your desires, urges and internal impulses that you have. True freedom is the ability to want the right thing and then to have the will power to overcome your First Order Desires (“*the flesh*”) in order to do the right thing.

“To live in freedom takes will power.”

— John Mark Comer

Our will is like a muscle. It will get tired, and it can be strengthened. We might notice that we begin to have less and less will power as the day goes on (morning vs late night). **One of the key tasks of a disciple of Jesus is learning how to exercise our will so that we can make it stronger.**

How Do We Exercise and Influence Our Will?

- **Teaching** — aimed at the mind; we change the stories that we believe; we get a vision of a new way to be human that is compelling
- **Practice** — aimed at the heart; we change our heart and desires; we come to love and long for this vision of human flourishing that we begin to love more than we want the desires of “*the flesh*”
- **Community** — aimed at our social world; we change the influences on our life; we participate in a social group that spurs one another on towards love and good deeds — towards the way of Jesus

All of these are way to exercise and strengthen our will power so that when we get to a moment of temptation, we actually have the will power to override our First Order Desires (“*the flesh*”) — to say ‘No’ to what you want in that moment so that you can say ‘Yes’ to what you really want in your soul.

But, here’s the bad news... “No matter how much will power you have, it’ll never be enough to live the way of Jesus.”

The Holy Spirit

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses talked with them. Afterward all the people of Israel came near, and he commanded them all that the LORD had spoken with him in Mount Sinai. And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face.

Whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he would remove the veil, until he came out. And when he came out and told the people of Israel what he was commanded, the people of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses’ face was shining. And Moses would put the veil over his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

— Exodus 34:29-35

Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it. For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory.

Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we **ALL**, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

— 2 Corinthians 3:7-18

Think about what Paul is saying here based on the original context of what is recorded in Exodus 34...

ALL followers of Jesus have the same kind of access to God's presence that Moses had!

Time out: Before you go any further in this study, think about that... Do you really believe that?

And not only do we have that kind of access, but the Spirit is also transforming us into the image of Jesus more and more each and every day over the course of our lives.

“Through Christ and by the Spirit we are being transformed so as to bear the likeness for which we were intended at the beginning... One takes the Spirit lightly in Pauline theology and Christian experience at great risk, for herein lies the ‘glory,’ that by the Spirit we not only come to know God, but come to live in his Presence in such a way as constantly to be renewed into God’s image.”

— Gordon Fee

Transformation Comes in 2 Ways

- Breakthrough Moments — rare and unplanned moments where God dramatically accelerates your transformation (ex. Paul on the road to Damascus); these are beautiful but they are often rare
- Process Moments — regular, planned, ordinary moments of our everyday life where God slowly transforms our character over a period of time

Breakthrough moments are often more about freedom and healing that is needed in our lives; the deep character change moments are usually the by-product of process moments.

Our Job is to Abide (to Walk by the Spirit)

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”

— John 15:1-5

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

— Galatians 5:16-25

Jesus has given us as his disciples one big command: We are to devote our entire lives to "abiding in the vine" or "walking by the Spirit" or "living by the Spirit" or "keeping in step with the Spirit". We to live our lives in relationship to God 24/7 and the by-product will be the fruit of love, joy, peace, etc. — the very inner disposition of Jesus himself.

And this is why discipline in practicing the way of Jesus is so essential to our transformation. They are the way that we open up ourselves to the presence of God and gain access to the power that we need to change. The disciplines are our responsibility.

"Teaching, practice and community. That's our responsibility. Everything else is God. Our job is simply to create the conditions in our life for the Holy Spirit to do a deep work of change."

— John Mark Comer

"The disciplines are activities of mind and body purposefully undertaken, to bring our personality and total being into effective cooperation with the divine order. They enable us more and more to live in a power that is, strictly speaking, beyond us, deriving from the spiritual realm itself, as we 'yield ourselves to God, as those that are alive from the dead, and our members as instruments of righteousness unto God,' as Romans 6:13 puts it."

— Dallas Willard

"The truth about significant soul transformation is this — change is possible, but it is harder than we want and takes longer than we expect."

— The Relational Soul

Homework

Take time to do the following during your time in silence and solitude this week...

- Ask God to reveal one habit or relationship or a pattern in your way of thinking that needs to be addressed. How is this affecting you and the way you interact with others?
- Then ask God to show you what practice of Jesus might help you in this area in your life. How might this practice help you offer yourself to God for the transforming work that only he can do?