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SESSION 1 | INTRODUCING SPIRITUAL FORMATION

I. INTRODUCTION

“But **grow** in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.” (2 Peter 3:18)

“For this very reason, **make every effort** to supplement your faith...” (2 Peter 1:5)

“Therefore, my beloved... **work out your own salvation** with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” (Philippians 2:12–13)

“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to **walk in a manner worthy of the calling** to which you have been called,” (Ephesians 4:1)

II. OBSTACLES TO GROWTH IN GODLINESS

We lack _____

We lack _____

We lack _____

III. WHAT IS SPIRITUAL FORMATION?

“Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.” (Proverbs 4:23)

Spiritual formation is the conscious process by which we seek to heighten and satisfy our Spirit-given thirst for God (Ps. 42:1-2) through divinely appointed means and with a view toward ‘working out our own salvation with fear and trembling’ (Phil. 2:12) and becoming ‘mature in Christ’ (Col. 1:28). Matthew Bingham, *A Heart Aflame for God*, 35.

IV. WHY LEARN FROM THE PURITANS?

Who are the Puritans?

What were the Puritans like?

Today, we use the term “puritan” or “puritanical” as a derogatory term to refer to someone who is overly strict or follows unnecessarily artificial rules.

“Puritanism is the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy.” H. L. Mencken

"We must picture these Puritans as the very opposite of those who bear that name today." C. S. Lewis

"When you think about Puritanism you must begin by getting rid of the slang term 'puritanism' as applied to Victorian religious hypocrisy." This does not apply to seventeenth-century Puritanism." A. G. Dickens

"The Puritans' sense of priorities in life was one of their greatest strengths. Putting God first and valuing everything else in relation to him was a recurrent Puritan theme. The Puritans knew that only God can satisfy people permanently and at the deepest level." Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 206

Why study the Puritans?

"...for those unacquainted with their writings, a first encounter with Puritan literature can be like entering a world where people seem bigger, wiser, and years older." Sinclair Ferguson, in Bingham, *A Heart Aflame*, 14–15.

"As taste-making voices in pop culture, academia, and the corporate world conspire to make the thought world of Scripture seem ever more implausible, remote, and offensive to contemporary, post-Christian sensibilities, the temptation for evangelical Christians will always be toward a sort of reverse discipleship in which the claims of Christ are accommodated ever more to the claims of culture and in which believers become conformed to this world rather than being 'transformed by the renewal of [their] mind' (Rom. 12:2). This is, of course, a perennial temptation in every age, but given that we in the West are now witnessing the collapse of many heretofore foundational societal assumptions about morality, sexuality, and what constitutes real human flourishing, the urgency of our need for countercultural biblical formation feels especially pressing." Bingham, *A Heart Aflame*, 15.

“...there are lessons for us in the integration of their daily lives. As their Christianity was all-embracing, so their living was all of a piece. Nowadays we would call their lifestyle holistic: all awareness, activity, and enjoyment, all ‘use of the creatures’ and development of personal powers and creativity, was integrated in the single purpose of honouring God by appreciating all his gifts and making everything ‘holiness to the Lord’. There was for them no disjunction between sacred and secular; all creation, so far as they were concerned, was sacred, and all activities, of whatever kind, must be sanctified, that is, done to the glory of God. So, in their heavenly-minded ardour, the Puritans became men and women of order, matter-of-fact and down-to-earth, prayerful, purposeful, practical. Seeing life whole, they integrated contemplation with action, worship with work, labour with rest, love of God with love of neighbour and of self, personal with social identity, and the wide spectrum of relational responsibilities with each other, in a thoroughly conscientious and thought-out way. In this thoroughness they were extreme, that is to say far more thorough than we are, but in their blending of the whole wide range of Christian duties set forth in Scripture they were eminently balanced. They lived by ‘method’ (we would say, by a rule of life), planning and proportioning their time with care, not so much to keep bad things out as to make sure that they got all good and important things in—necessary wisdom, then as now, for busy people! We today, who tend to live unplanned lives at random in a series of non-communicating compartments and who hence feel swamped and distracted most of the time, could learn much from the Puritans at this point.” J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 23–24.

V. CONCLUSION

“Life close to God’s Word is life close to God.” B. B. Warfield, in Bingham, *A Heart Aflame*, 72.