



“Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.”

-John 7:38-39 (NIV)

The Goal of Spiritual Formation

By now we are well aware that one of our primary goals as followers of Jesus is to be transformed into a better and better reflection of Jesus. This goal is rooted in passages like these:

- **Romans 12:1-2**, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. 2 ***Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed*** by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”
- **Galatians 4:19**, “My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth ***until Christ is formed in you...***”
- **2 Corinthians 3:18**, “18 And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being ***transformed into his image*** with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”
- **Ephesians 4:22-24**, “22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 ***and to put on the new self***, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”

It’s Not Rocket Surgery: If We Want to Be Like Jesus, We Have to Know What Jesus was Like.

If your friend invited you over for dinner at their house, it’d be nearly impossible to know where to go without their address. Technically you could work by process of elimination and start knocking on every single door in the whole city until you happened to find your friend. But that’s probably the least efficient way to go about it. After all, Bakersfield has approximately 125,000 houses. *That’s a lot of door knocking.*

Instead, any sane person would just ask for the address and then use GPS (or an old school map) to find their way. That’s because you can’t get to where you want to be until you clearly identify your destination.

The passages about Spiritual Transformation (on the left) define our destination: to be like Jesus in all aspects of our lives. But even that deserves some further clarification. If we want to reach our goal of being like Jesus, we need to know what Jesus was like.

In the 15th century, a German-Dutch monk named Thomas à Kempis wrote a book called *The Imitation of Christ*¹, which by some measures is the most widely read Christian book outside of the Bible itself. As you might guess from the title, *The Imitation of Christ* is a powerful call for Christians to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ.

¹ This book can be accessed for free at <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1653/1653-h/1653-h.htm>

The opening lines of his book go like this:

*“He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness,’ saith the Lord. These are the words of Christ; and they teach us how far we must imitate His life and character, if we seek true illumination, and deliverance from all blindness of heart. **Let it be our most earnest study, therefore, to dwell upon the life of Jesus Christ.**”*

If we want to be imitators of Jesus, we must devote serious time and attention to understanding everything there is to know about Jesus: how he lived, what he was like, what he valued, and the spiritual disciplines he employed to stay invigorated in his ministry. Once we *know* him, we will know how to be *like him*.

Streams of Living Water

Richard Foster (author of *Celebration of Discipline*) is once again an important voice on our spiritual journey. Like Thomas à Kempis before him, Richard Foster emphasizes our need to follow the example of Jesus:

“When we carefully consider how Jesus lived while among us in the flesh, we learn how we are to live—truly live—empowered by him who is with us always even to the end of the age. We then begin an intentional imitatio Christi, imitation of Christ, not in some slavish or literal fashion but by catching the spirit and power in which he lived and by learning to walk ‘in his steps’ (1 Pet 2:21).

Richard Foster, Streams of Living Water

In the rest of this book (*Streams of Living Water*), Foster identifies six major themes from Jesus’ life that he believes we must imitate *in a balanced way* if we truly want to be like Jesus:

1. A Prayer-Filled Life (Contemplative Tradition)
2. A Virtuous Life (Holiness Tradition)
3. A Spirit-Empowered Life (Charismatic Tradition)
4. A Compassionate Life (Social Justice Tradition)
5. A Word-Centered Life (Evangelical Tradition)
6. A Sacramental Life (Incarnational Tradition)

Each of these “streams” have had their champions throughout church history—groups of Christians who have felt especially called to that particular expression of our discipleship. But it’s equally true that many of these streams have been woefully

neglected in various periods of church history and by certain groups of Christians. *Streams of Living Water* explores how each stream began in the life of Jesus and then continued on throughout the history of Christianity by specific individuals or groups who felt a special affinity for that tradition.

Because each of these streams is rooted in Jesus’ own life and ministry, they are all worthy of our careful consideration. We will likely find that we are strong in some and weak in others. That should not be a source of shame or disappointment; rather, it should be a welcome opportunity to identify some concrete ways that we can be transformed into a better reflection of Jesus.

What Are the The Six Streams?

Here’s a quick rundown of the six streams, taken from *Streams of Living Water* by Richard Foster.

1. A Prayer-Filled Life (Contemplative Tradition)

Jesus had a vibrant prayer life. He frequently spent time alone praying to God. He practiced times of silence and solitude in order to stay spiritually invigorated for his preaching and healing ministry. Christians throughout the centuries have followed Jesus’ example by retreating away from the busyness of city life in order to find solitude with God. The desert fathers and monastics are prime examples of the contemplative tradition.

2. A Virtuous Life (Holiness Tradition)

Jesus had a knack for knowing the right thing to do or say in every situation. He was highly attuned to the will of God and was always able to respond appropriately (i.e. in a God-honoring way) no matter the circumstances. The holiness tradition emphasizes our need to honor God with our daily choices and actions through a life of purity, integrity, and holiness of heart. In the 18th century, a movement of Christians who were concerned with the moral laxity of the day developed a “method” for holy living, and the church began to once again take sin seriously.

3. A Spirit-Empowered Life (Charismatic Tradition)

Jesus traveled from town to town performing miracles through the power of the Spirit. He walked in step with the Spirit and emphasized the crucial role that the Spirit would play in the lives of his followers. Christians in the Charismatic tradition (e.g. Quakers, Mennonites, and Pentecostals) emphasize the Spirit’s active role in their lives (and in their churches).

4. A Compassionate Life (Social Justice Tradition)

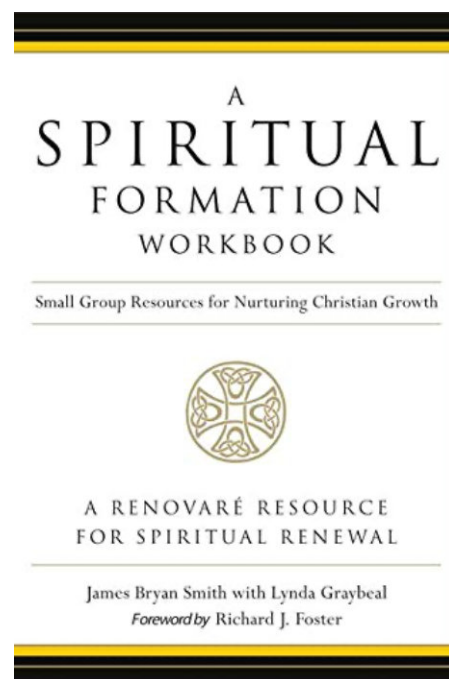
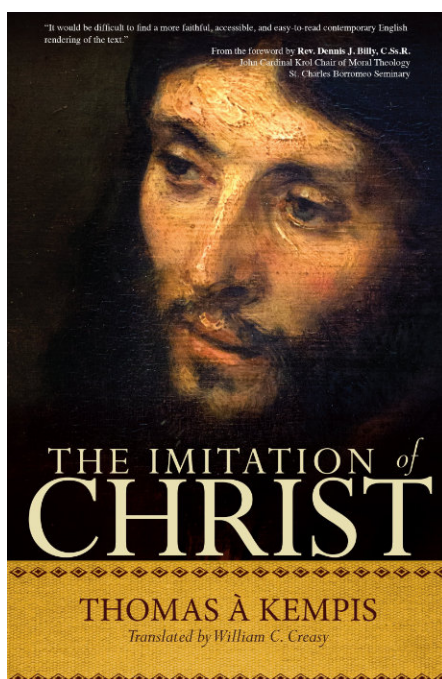
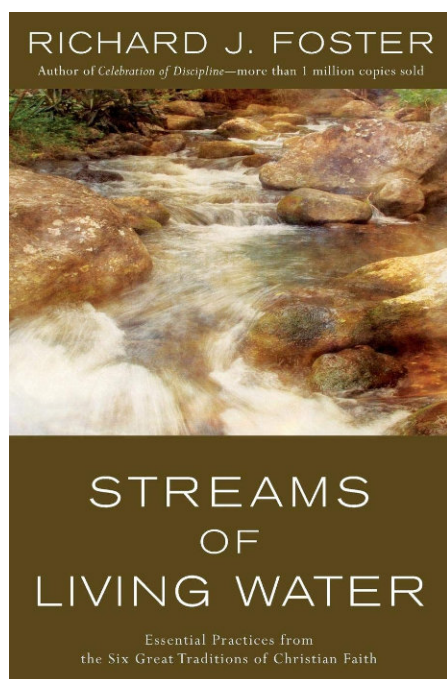
Jesus' was passionate about ministering to people's physical needs. He healed diseases, fed the hungry, and told vibrant parables about our need to love our neighbors as ourselves. Christians like Francis of Assisi took this example seriously and devoted themselves to caring for the poor. St. Francis captured the spirit of the Social Justice tradition in his famous quote, *"Preach the Gospel always. When necessary, use words."*

5. A Word-Centered Life (Evangelical Tradition)

The opening lines of the Gospel of John call Jesus "The Word." He embodies God's truth, speaks God's truth, and expects us to go and share the Gospel truth all over the world. But for most of the church's history, Christians did not have easy access to the written word of God. God's Word was vested in the leaders of the church who were wealthy enough to receive an education and have access to the written Word. As technology advanced and more and more average Christians became literate, the church rediscovered the power of God's Word. Christian reformers like Martin Luther reacted strongly against a paradigm that placed authority in the Catholic priesthood, rather than in the Word of God itself. And that gave birth to the evangelical tradition which emphasized the transforming power of God's Gospel message.

6. A Sacramental Life (Incarnational Tradition)

In more formalized Christian circles, a *sacrament* is a physical event with spiritual significance (e.g. baptism or the Lord's Supper). Other church traditions use a similar word (ordinance) to describe essentially the same phenomenon. Either way, a Sacramental life refers to a way of doing ministry and experiencing God's presence in the midst of our daily routine. We praise God and share the Gospel while going to work, taking our kids to school, or walking around in our neighborhood. Jesus walked alongside us in a very tangible way while simultaneously pointing us to the deep truths of God. In that way, his life was sacramental or incarnational. Missionaries that put down roots in the communities they're ministering to—getting jobs, working alongside their local community, and investing in their holistic health—are good examples of this incarnational tradition.



Looking Ahead: Schedule and Goals for Spiritual Formation

Here's what's next: We will be taking a closer look at each of these six streams over the next three months. Each class member will receive a copy of a book called "A Spiritual Formation Workbook." You can purchase a new copy of the book for \$11 or a used copy of the book for \$5. There is also an eBook version through Amazon (or other online book retailers).

Each chapter is dedicated to one of the six traditions from *Streams of Living Water*. It has reading, reflection questions, and passages to read. At the end of the book, there is also an appendix with fifteen specific ways to practice each tradition that you can experiment with.

We'll spend a total of two weeks on each stream. The first week, Bryan will introduce the stream and show where it comes from in Jesus' life. Between the first and second weeks, class members will read through the corresponding chapter in the workbook. The second week we will discuss the workbook material and leave some time for questions. Then, we'll do it all over again with the next of the six streams.

Class Schedule:

Date	Class Topic	Reading Due	Practices
Aug 10	Intro to the Six Streams	None	
Aug 17	Teaching: Contemplative Tradition	Session 1: Six Traditions (optional)	
Aug 24	Discussion: Contemplative Tradition	Session 2: Prayer-Filled Life	p. 87-88
Aug 31	Teaching: Holiness Tradition		
Sep 7	Discussion: Holiness Tradition	Session 3: Virtuous Life	p. 89-90
Sep 14	Teaching: Charismatic Tradition		
Sep 21	Discussion: Charismatic Tradition	Session 4: Spirit-Empowered Life	p. 91-92
Sep 28	Teaching: Social Justice Tradition		
Oct 5	Discussion: Social Justice Tradition	Session 5: Compassionate Life	p. 93-94
Oct 12	Teaching: Evangelical Tradition		
Oct 19	Discussion: Evangelical Tradition	Session 6: Word-Centered Life	p. 95-96
Oct 26	Teaching: Incarnational Tradition		
Nov 2	Discussion: Incarnational Tradition	Session 7: Sacramental Life	p. 97-98

Note: If you are an avid reader, you could also choose to read the corresponding chapter in *Streams of Living Water* in preparation for the Wednesdays when Bryan is introducing a new stream. For example, you could read Ch. 2 (Contemplative Tradition) by August 17th, Ch. 3 (Holiness Tradition) by August 24th, etc. Each *Streams of Living Water* chapter is approximately 40-50 pages long, compared to about 10 pages in the *Spiritual Formation Workbook*. *Streams of Living Water* is around \$11 new and \$5 or under used.