

john 15:4  
**A**bide in ME



Bible studies for disciples who make disciples

Loudonville Community Church

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*Jesus-Formation*  
**Thinking Like Jesus...**  
**About Character**  
**Matthew 5:1-16**

**THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY**

**Authority of the Bible** *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

We believe the Bible to be the inspired, the only infallible, authoritative Word of God.

**Main Point:** We are to think like Jesus so that we can live like Jesus.

**Spiritual Formation in Christ**  
A Perspective on What it is and How it Might be  
"... until Christ be formed in you" (Gal. 4:19)  
By Dallas Willard<sup>1</sup>

"Spiritual formation" is a phrase that has recently rocketed onto the lips and into the ears of Protestant Christians with an abruptness that is bound to make a thoughtful person uneasy. If it is really so important, not to mention essential, then why is it so recent? It must be just another passing fad in Protestant religiosity, increasingly self-conscious and threatened about "not meeting the needs of the people." And, really, isn't spiritual formation just a little too Catholic to be quite right?

We could forget the phrase "Spiritual formation," but the fact and need would still be there to be dealt with. The spiritual side of the human being, Christian and non-Christian alike, develops into the reality which it becomes, for good or ill. Everyone receives spiritual formation, just as everyone gets an education. The only question is whether it is a good one or a bad one. We need to take a conscious, intentional hand in the developmental process. We need to understand what the formation of the human spirit is, and how it can best be done as Christ would have it done. This is an indispensable aspect of developing a psychology that is adequate to human life.

The reason for the recent abrupt emergence of the terminology into religious life is, I believe, a growing suspicion or realization that we have not done well with the reality and the need. We have counted on preaching, teaching, and knowledge or information to form faith in the hearer, and have counted on faith to form the inner life and outward behavior of the Christian. But, for whatever reason, this strategy has not turned out well. The result is that we have multitudes of professing Christians who well may be ready to die, but obviously are not ready to live, and can hardly get along with themselves, much less with others.

Most statistical measures and anecdotal portraits of Evangelical Christians, not to mention Christians in general, show a remarkable similarity in the life-texture of Christians and non-Christians. Even among clergy, simple rest in and obedience to Christ is not something to assume without special indications; thus, we should look carefully at the whole issue of spiritual formation, especially to identify the essence of the gospel and the eternal kind of life that may correspond to it.

Occasionally, today one also finds those who think of spiritual formation in terms of practicing spiritual disciplines. This is a relatively recent development among Evangelicals. The disciplines are regarded as part of the process of spiritual formation—which is not an altogether bad idea—or as the practice of spirituality, and formation is regarded as whatever

it takes to bring us to where we are able to engage rightly in a life of spiritual disciplines. In any case, one way of thinking about spiritual formation is to identify it by references to certain specifically religious practices. Often such practices are spoken of today as "a spirituality."

Spiritual formation may also be thought of as the shaping of the inner life, the spirit, or the spiritual side of the human being. The formation of the heart or will (which I believe is best taken as the 'spirit') of the individual, along with the emotions and intellect, is therefore the primary focus, regardless of what overt practices may or may not be involved. Here, what is formed is explicitly the spiritual dimension of the self. We speak of spiritual formation in this case precisely because that which is formed (the subject matter shaped) is the spiritual aspect of personality. Of course, it is assumed that there will be effects in the realm of overt practice.

Finally, spiritual formation may be thought of as a shaping by the spirit or by the spiritual realm, and by the Holy Spirit and other spiritual agencies involved in the kingdom of God, especially the Word of God. We speak of spiritual formation here because the means (or agencies) that do the shaping of the human personality and life are spiritual.

Of course, spiritual formation only works because of the ... formation by the Spirit of God in Christ. This comes initially and mainly through immersion in and constant application (John 8:31; 15:7) of the word of Christ, his gospel and his commands that are inseparable from his person and his presence: "The words that I speak to you," he said, "are spirit and life" (John 6:63). But it is the movement of the Spirit in the spiritual formation of the individual personality that transforms the roots of behavior throughout the soul and body of the believer which goes beyond simply hearing and receiving this word. Thus, when we have put on the new person—and we must act to do this, as it will not be done for us—we find the outflow of Christ's character from us to be, after all, the fruit of the spirit.

Spiritual formation in Christ is accomplished, and the Great Commission fulfilled, as the regenerate soul makes its highest intent to live in the commandments of Christ, and accordingly makes realistic plans to realize this intent by an adequate course of spiritual disciplines. Of course, no one can achieve this goal by themselves, but no one has to. God gives us others to share the pilgrimage, and we will be met by Christ in every step of the way. "Look, I am with you every instant," is what Jesus said; and it is also what he is doing.

<sup>1</sup>Dallas Willard, author and university professor is now with the Lord. This article is abridged and slightly edited. It can be accessed at: <http://www.dwillard.org/articles/individual/spiritual-formation-in-christa-perspective-on-what-it-is-and-how-it-might-be>

<sup>2</sup>For a fuller discussion, see Dallas Willard's *The Spirit of the Discipline*.

## STEP ONE . . .

### OBSERVATION

*What does the text say?*

~ Matthew 5:1-16 ~

- <sup>5:1</sup> Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain,  
and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.
- <sup>2</sup> And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:
- <sup>3</sup> "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- <sup>4</sup> "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
- <sup>5</sup> "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
- <sup>6</sup> "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
for they shall be satisfied.
- <sup>7</sup> "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.
- <sup>8</sup> "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
- <sup>9</sup> "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.
- <sup>10</sup> "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>11</sup>“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

<sup>13</sup>“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet.

<sup>14</sup>“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

1. Circle **seeing the crowds and his disciples came to him** (v. 1). Draw a line from the first phrase to the second and write above the line: *a clear distinction*.
2. Above the phrase **he went up on a mountain** write: *Jesus is the new Moses*.
3. Draw a † over each pronoun referring to Jesus in verses 1-2 and 11.
4. Underline all occurrences of **blessed**.
5. In the right margin write: Makarios = flourishing.
6. Double underline the eight qualities Jesus affirms in verses 3-12.
7. Draw a > after each occurrence of the preposition **for** (i.e. **for>**).
8. Place brackets around **the kingdom of heaven** in verses 3 and 10.
9. At the end of verse 3 write: = *the rule and reign of God*.
10. Draw a Δ over Father in verses 8 and 16.
11. Draw a line from **his disciples** (v. 1) to **you** in verses 13 and 14.

### Complementary Passage

~ Psalm 1 ~

Blessed is the man  
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,  
nor stands in the way of sinners,  
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;  
<sup>2</sup>but his delight is in the law of the Lord,  
and on his law he meditates day and night.

<sup>3</sup>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.

<sup>4</sup>The wicked are not so,  
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

<sup>5</sup>Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,  
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;

<sup>6</sup>for the Lord knows the way of the righteous,  
but the way of the wicked will perish.

## STEP TWO . . .

### UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

*What does the text mean?*

The commentary is intended to enhance your own study of the text.

<sup>1</sup> **He went up on a mountain.** Just as Moses ascended Mount Sinai to hear from God and then speak to God's people so Jesus, the new Moses, ascends a mountain and speaks to His disciples.

**He sat down.** Jesus assumed the conventional posture of a Rabbi while teaching. It also stresses the centrality and authoritative nature of His teaching. The Sermon on the Mount is the opening of Jesus' mind to His disciples.

**Seeing the crowds ... his disciples came to him.** There is a difference between the crowds and the disciples. "The difference between those who *admire* Jesus and those who would be *His disciples* is indicated by His disciple's willingness to come to Him on the mountain" (Hauerwas, italics added). However, Jesus also wanted the crowd to hear His words too.

<sup>2</sup> **And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying.** The beatitudes are structured around two sections with four beatitudes in each. The first four have to do with our relationship with God. The last four have to do with our relationship with others. Important Note: The Sermon on the Mount is not about how to win God's favor. It describes how God wants those to live who have already been transformed by His grace.

<sup>3</sup> **Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.** Literally, "O the blessedness of the poor in spirit" etc., For each beatitude there is no verb (i.e. there is no *are*). Instead, the beatitudes are exclamations (see the previous note). **Blessed** [*makarios*] technically means happiness though our English word has lost its older and deeper meaning. **Blessed** is a special word that depicts God-like joy, conveying the essence of human flourishing. **Kingdom of heaven.** We are presently part of the kingdom but there is also a stress on the future reality of the kingdom.

**The poor in spirit.** Or, an impoverished spirit. It refers to those who have a humble heart, are conscious of their need, and are spiritually bankrupt apart from God. Blessed is the man who has realized his own utter helplessness, and who has put his whole trust in God.

<sup>4</sup> **Those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.** This is the strongest word for mourning in the Greek language. It describes a deep lament. It's the emotional counterpart to the first beatitude. The one who mourns has a sensitivity to sin that is marked by sorrow; whose heart is broken for the world's suffering and for his own sin. Out of that kind of sorrow the disciple discovers the joy of God.

<sup>5</sup> **Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.** Meekness describes someone who is gentle and humble.

A disciple is poor in spirit, laments over sin, and is not brash and self-assertive.

<sup>6</sup> **Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.** The disciple has both a deep longing for both personal holiness (things of the world fade away) and justice for the oppressed.

<sup>7</sup> **Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.** Because the meek understand their true position of poverty of spirit before God, they treat others with kindness. We are able to forgive others because we know we have been forgiven by God.

<sup>8</sup> **Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.** The pure in heart have right motives. They aren't motivated by selfish interests or other people's approval.

<sup>9</sup> **Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.** Jesus is not talking about peacekeeping but active peacemaking, the disciple who takes the initiative to reconcile people to one another and to God through the gospel of peace.

<sup>10</sup> **Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.** <sup>11</sup> **Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.**

<sup>12</sup> **Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.** Verses 10-12 are packaged around the same blessing. Disciples will be maligned and attacked for their righteous living.

<sup>13</sup> **You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.** Coming out of the beatitudes, Jesus summarizes the character of His disciples and their relationship to the unbelieving world with two metaphors. First, **you are the salt of the earth.** This is not an imperative (a command) but an indicative (a statement of fact). Salt has a preservative value and enhances the taste of food.

<sup>14</sup> **You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.** <sup>15</sup> **Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.** <sup>16</sup> **In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.** The second metaphor Jesus uses to describe His disciples is light. We are not to isolate ourselves but model what it means to live like Jesus before the watching world.

**STEP THREE . . .**

**EXPLORING** the passage through discussion

1. Read the Great Commandment from Mark 12:28-30. What are the four ways we are to love God? What does it mean to love Jesus with our mind?

2. The main point of Sunday's message was to encourage us to think like Jesus so that we can live like Jesus. From this main point two questions emerge:

Is it possible for us to think like Jesus? (What are some obstacles we face when trying to think like Jesus?)

Ideally, why should thinking precede living?

3. Why is the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) an important place to learn how Jesus thinks?

4. According to Matthew 5:1, Jesus was speaking to His disciples directly and the crowd indirectly. Why is that an important distinction for understanding Jesus' sermon?

5. Review the beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-12. In what ways are the beatitudes countercultural? How does Jesus capture in the beatitudes the very opposite of how the world thinks?

6. Which beatitude challenges your thinking the most?

7. What are some clear patterns that characterized the thinking of Jesus?

8. Learning how to make wise decisions is a part of the discipleship of the mind. What is your normal decision-making process? What would it look like for that process to be more and more formed by Jesus?

## STEP FOUR . . .

### REFLECTION

*How is the text to be lived out personally?  
Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the Word but doers ~ James 1:22*

You're encouraged to journal your answers to the following questions in order to apply what you've learned this week.

1. How is God making Himself known to you?
2. What is going on beneath the surface of your life that Jesus is trying to change?
3. How is God calling you to serve your family, community, and world?

### PRAYER

*Dear God, we know that all the treasures of knowledge  
and wisdom are found in Christ.  
Though we are fallen,  
our minds are being renewed daily through Christ.  
So give us the mind of Christ,  
a love for Your Word,  
a hunger for righteousness,  
and a discerning spirit that is formed by Him  
that we might think like Jesus,  
in order that we might live like Him. Amen.*

### Memory Verse

~Matthew 5:14-16~

<sup>14</sup>“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup>Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup>In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

## THE MISSION OF LOUDONVILLE COMMUNITY CHURCH

We are committed to reaching and teaching people to become devoted followers of Jesus Christ, connecting them to one another and sending them to serve their families, communities and world.

### 10 CORE BELIEFS OF A DISCIPLE

#### **Authority of the Bible** *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

We believe the Bible to be the inspired, the only infallible, authoritative Word of God.

#### **The Godhead** *2 Corinthians 13:14*

We believe that there is one God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

#### **The Deity and Sinlessness of Christ** *Colossians 2:9*

We believe in the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life.

#### **The Sufficient Atonement of Christ** *2 Corinthians 5:19-21*

We believe in His vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood.

#### **The Resurrection and Return of Christ** *Acts 1:3, 9-11*

We believe in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and in His personal return in power and glory.

#### **Salvation By Grace** *Ephesians 2:8-9*

We believe that for the salvation of lost and sinful man, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential and that a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

#### **The Ministry of the Holy Spirit** *John 14:16*

We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit by whose indwelling the Christian is enabled to live a godly life.

#### **Unity in Christ** *Ephesians 2:14-17*

We believe in the spiritual unity of all believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.

#### **Eternity** *Revelation 21:22-27*

We believe in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved unto the resurrection of life and they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.

#### **Stewardship** *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

We believe that everything we have or own belongs to God.

