

THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE

Practicing Wesleyan-Holiness
Spiritual Formation



SESSION 1

What Is Spiritual Formation?

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What Is Spiritual Formation?

SESSION OVERVIEW

Defining Key Concepts

Rapunzel: A Story of Transformation

Transformation on the Journey

Application

Exam

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should be able to:

- define and explain the key concepts of transformation and spiritual formation as they will be used in this class
- appreciate the big picture of this course and embrace the study of your own spiritual journey

What Is Spiritual Formation?



INTRODUCTION

JOURNALING

Throughout this module, it is suggested you keep a journal. This is an important tool in the study of spiritual formation. Journaling is a device to help you slow down in your studies and listen to your heart, soul, mind, and most importantly to God. There will be journal prompt(s) provided for each session.

THE KING AND HIS TWO SONS

Once there was a king who wanted his two sons to grow up to be courteous, well-mannered gentlemen. But in their youth their behavior made him wonder if they would ever reach such a goal. He challenged the boys with this proposition: Suppose a man wanted his son to become a gentleman. Could he make a gentleman of him by proper training and education?

The first son answered, "Of course, train him right and the father could make whatever he wants out of the boy." The second son declared, "No, you are wrong. No amount of mere training would produce a gentleman." The king, seeing that they disagreed, gave the boys a month to think and study. Then they would be summoned to appear before the king, and each would try to prove his case.

The one who proved his case would be given his father's throne when the king passed to the other world. The first son decided to think it over by meditating in a tavern. He ordered a drink. To his surprise he saw that his drink was served to him by a cat, a cat dressed in a waiter's uniform, walking on its back legs. Aha! If you can train a cat to be a waiter—well, the first son knew he had the winning argument. He purchased the trained cat from the tavern owner. It cost him plenty, but he could afford it because soon he would be the king.

The second son saw what had happened. He too thought that his brother had won the argument and would soon wear the king's crown. How the second son wanted to be king. But how could he compete with a cat trained as a waiter—and a good one at that. Then one day as he walked sadly down the street thinking of the lost throne, he saw something that made him smile.

The day came for the hearing before the king. The first son presented his trained cat. The cat was dressed in royal attire, walked on its back legs, and daintily served the king a plate of three chocolates. Next the elegant, trained cat was to serve the king hot tea. But just as he approached the king with the steaming potion the second son opened the bag he was carrying and emptied it on the floor. Five frightened mice went running for cover. The elegant, trained cat dropped the tea, scalding the king. On all fours, the cat pounced on the nearest mouse, snarling, growling, and gobbling its favorite food!

What is the significance of this story? This story was half the final examination for a spiritual formation course at a seminary in Manila. Two of the answers from the Manila seminary class were precisely accurate.

- As good as training and discipline are, when it comes to our hearts, transformation is what we need most.
- Training is good, but it is transformation we need.

DEFINING KEY CONCEPTS



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Transformation is the key word for this session. Spiritual formation is about transformation. Training, education, disciplines, hard work—all these are good, but when it comes to our sinful hearts it is transformation we need. This focus on transformation is a reminder of our dependency upon God’s mercy, power and love to create change in our lives. We cannot transform ourselves. It is always God who initiates and provides power for real change.

Unfortunately many of us are like the cat all dressed in royal attire. We look like followers of Christ, we act like followers of Christ but when the real challenge comes we reveal we were only playing dress up. There are disheartening studies which reveal very little lifestyle distinction between those who claim to be followers of Christ and those who do not. The good news is through the power of the Holy Spirit we can move from dressing up to true transformation.

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being *transformed* into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18, NIV, emphasis added).

All of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being *transformed* into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18, NRSV, emphasis added).

To transform means to change. The word can mean to change the outward appearance—to change the outward form. That can be a superficial change. The New Testament word for changing the outward appearance is *metasche*. This is the word used when the Bible speaks of false prophets masquerading or taking on the outward form of apostles and when the devil himself takes on the form of an angel (2 Cor. 11:13-14).

Spiritual formation is not something we can do if we have the right recipe and work really hard. Transformation is the work of God. Our job is to create the spaces and places in which that transformation can occur.

But there is another word for transformation that means to change or convert the nature, the personality, and the character. *Metamorphoo* is the word used when the Bible tells us, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2). This same word is

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used in 2 Cor. 3:18, “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being *transformed* into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (emphasis added).

This transformation of the whole person is what God promises to do in and through our lives. Transformation is the work of God. It can be quick, as in the twinkling of an eye change when a person meets Christ and is born again. “If anyone is in Christ,” the Bible says, “he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Cor. 5:17).

That is instantaneous transformation. Another example of instantaneous transformation is seen in Acts 15:9 when the new believers were baptized with the Holy Spirit and experienced the cleansing of their hearts by faith. The sanctifying Spirit can cleanse the heart in the twinkling of an eye.

RAPUNZEL: A STORY OF TRANSFORMATION



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Remember the fairy tale about Rapunzel? She was held captive in a dark tower by a wicked witch. The evil witch removes all the mirrors so that Rapunzel can never see what she looks like. She keeps telling Rapunzel that she is world-class ugly; really hard to look at. The witch told her, “Rapunzel, you look just like me.” Poor Rapunzel believes it. With no mirrors she cannot see her real beauty. Thus, she remains a prisoner of her supposed ugliness. The witch knows that believing she is ugly she will never try to escape.

Then along comes Prince Charming on his white horse. At that moment Rapunzel is leaning out of the tower to get some fresh air. The prince sees her. Their eyes meet and it is love at first sight. Rapunzel lets down her beautiful long hair, and the prince climbs up it to the tower to rescue her. They gaze at each other lovingly. In the shining eyes of Prince Charming, Rapunzel sees the reflection of her own face. In the mirror—in the mirror of his eyes— she sees for the first time that she is beautiful.

When you weep over the ugliness of your sin, remember that you are more than a sinner. You are created in God’s image. Mirrored in the eyes of the Savior you will first come to see your true beauty, the beautiful Christian that you can become. Have you experienced an instant transformation?

These can be exciting times when our view of ourselves, God and the world change in an instant. Rapunzel still had future work to do to understand herself as loved by another. In a similar way, even when God has done a dramatic work of instant change in our life, there is a journey ahead in which the ramifications of God’s love, mercy, and grace need to sink into all of our lives.

TRANSFORMATION ON THE JOURNEY



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Spiritual transformation can also be as slow as a tadpole becoming a frog or a cocooned larva becoming a butterfly. It can take decades, as in a child becoming a mature adult. It can take most of a lifetime, as we see in the life of Abraham who took a century or more to move from a fledgling of faith to passing test after test and finally becoming the friend of God through whom all nations of the earth have been blessed.

This kind of transformation happens over time. This is the transformation of 2 Corinthians 3:18. "All of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are *being transformed* into the same image from one degree of glory to another" (NRSV, emphasis added).

Many classic stories focus on a hero who sets out on a journey. It takes longer than expected. Great difficulties and dangers arise. But by journey's end the traveler is transformed. Think, for example, of Joseph who went from an arrogant young snob in a coat of many colors, to kidnap victim, to slave, to prisoner, and finally to ruler saving God's people.

This is the sort of transformation that awaits every saved and sanctified Christian: a lifetime of ongoing transformation into the image of Jesus Christ. The old time Holiness people testified: "I am sanctified and I am being sanctified."

The gift of understanding our life with God as a journey is to know that God's work is not finished. We have the exciting adventure of knowing there is more of God's love for us to receive. Whatever stage of life or age we now enjoy there is more that God wants to teach us.

Our relationship with God is a dynamic one with more growth and greater intimacy. This dynamic relationship has then both opportunity and danger inherent in its vitality. Whatever powerful moments or significant decisions we have known in the past we must continue to work it out in the realities of today.

Note that the transforming journey is made out of the experience of saving and sanctifying grace and not merely in search of them. This is not a journey searching for God but rather a journey we take with God seeking to share life in deepening ways.


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The experiences of being born again and being sanctified do not form the apex of spiritual formation. They are instead the starting place for a journey, an adventure, into wholeness and Christlikeness. Both instantaneous and gradual transformations are utterly essential for the journey of spiritual formation.

SPIRITUAL FORMATION

The phrase spiritual formation derives from Gal. 4:19 where St. Paul wrote, “My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.” Paul uses the word *morphoo* (form)—closely related to *metamorphoo* (transform)—and it refers to the essential nature, not mere outward form. This is a significant distinction. Outward changes are relatively easy but have difficulties surviving the long haul.

Paul is praying that the inward nature of the Galatian believers would become so like Christ that one could say Christ has been formed in them. They would be mere humans, not divine, not a Savior themselves, but they would have real Christlike character and behavior.

Think about a person in your church you would describe as Christlike. Consider asking them about the spiritual practices of their lives which have created a difference in their attitudes and actions. They will probably quickly point out to you their shortcomings. We all know ourselves and our limitations. It may be important for them to hear that despite those limitations you are seeing Christ through them.

The authors of *The Upward Call* define spiritual formation in these words: “The whole person in relationship with God, within the community of believers, growing in Christlikeness, reflected in a Spirit-directed, disciplined lifestyle, and demonstrated in redemptive action in our world.”

Spiritual formation then is the outworking of the grace of God in the hearts and actions of human beings. It begins with God’s grace which is poured out to us “before the foundation of the world.” We may first consciously experience it as saving grace (conversion) and then sanctifying grace, and then the grace for a lifetime of growth until we “become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13).

Spiritual formation is more than a matter of the interior life. It includes Christian fellowship, community, and worship (Eph. 4:15-16) as well as acts of service (Gal. 6:10). We must keep our eyes upon Christ constantly, for into His image we are being transformed.

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The transforming power comes from God—every bit of it. We cannot transform ourselves. Through the centuries, however, believers have discovered that certain disciplines, devotional skills, practices, and acts of Christian service keep us in the presence of Christ where the Holy Spirit has a chance to go on transforming us.

This module will focus primarily on those very spiritual disciplines, devotional skills, and practices that open the door to the transforming Spirit. Each session will invite you to a deeper awareness of your need and ultimately some life giving practices for spiritual formation. Throughout your work in this module, consider these two questions:

- What am I currently not doing that, if I was doing, would open myself up more to God's work of grace in my life?
- What am I currently doing that, if eliminated, would open myself up more to God's work of grace in my life?

CLOSING THOUGHT

God's love for you is beyond measure. When you see sin, God sees potential forgiveness. When you see failure, God sees obstacles that can be overcome. When you feel weary God is ready to pour out new strength. God sees the beauty of who you are and all you can become. God's arms are outstretched inviting us to come and know the power of transformation marking our lives each day. A study of spiritual formation can feel like layers of increasingly heavy demands or an invitation to receive the river of life that sets us free. It is our hope you will experience an ever-deepening freedom and joy.

Psalm 42: 7-8: "Deep calls to deep at the thunder of your cataracts; all your waves and your billows have gone over me. By day the Lord commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me—a prayer to the God of my life."

APPLICATION



NOTES

Be prepared to share the first three application activities with your mentor.

1. Interview two or three persons over the age of 21. Explain to them the concept of transformation as treated in today's session. Then ask them to share examples of both gradual and instantaneous transformation they have observed or experienced. Explore with them what spiritual practices have been the most effective in creating life change. Write an account that captures the most important aspects of the interviews.
2. Read the story of Abraham or Joseph in Genesis and write a paper on the character development you notice. Write about the gradual transformation of Abraham or Joseph.
3. After considering the content of the materials, the Bible verses, and reading the material on transformation and spiritual formation, write a definition of these terms in your own words.

JOURNALING

Note: Throughout your work in this course, it is suggested you keep a journal. This is an important tool in the study of spiritual formation. Journaling is a tool to help you slow down in your studies and listen to your heart, soul, mind, and most importantly to God.

Consider some of the following when journaling:

- One idea, Bible verse, or story that made an impression on me today was . . .
- A new idea I encountered today is . . .
- One thing that made me uncomfortable today was. . .
- The effort I am willing to put into this course and into my own spiritual formation during this module is best described by the word . . .
- The prayer I most want to pray right now is . . .

**NOTES****SUGGESTED READING**

- Dunning, H. Ray, "Humanity as Sinful," *Grace, Faith and Holiness*, (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City), 1988, chapter 9.
- Foster, Richard, "Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth," (San Francisco: HarperCollins), 1998, chapter 1.
- Grider, J. Kenneth, "The Doctrine of Sin," *A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology*, (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City), 1994, chapter 10.
- Ortberg, John, "The Life You Always Wanted," (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), chapters 1 and 2.
- Thompson, Marjorie, "Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life," (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press), 2005, chapter 1.
- Tracy, Wesley, et al. "Somehow I Expected More," and "What Went Wrong, Anyway," *Reflecting God*, student textbook (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2000), chapters 1 and 4.
- Morris Weigelt, et al. "Sabotaged By Sin," *The Upward Call*, (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City), 1994, chapter. 2.
- Willard, Dallas, "The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives," (San Francisco: HarperCollins), 1998, chapter 1.

HELPFUL WEB SITES

- www.renovare.org

EXAM



NOTES

1. To transform means to change.
 - A. True
 - B. False
2. The sanctifying Spirit can cleanse the heart in the twinkling of an eye.
 - A. True
 - B. False
3. We have the power to transform ourselves.
 - A. True
 - B. False
4. Spiritual formation is only concerned with the interior life.
 - A. True
 - B. False
5. Being born again and being sanctified is the apex of spiritual formation.
 - A. True
 - B. False
6. The authors of *The Upward Call* define spiritual formation in these words: "The whole person in relationship with God, within the community of believers, growing in Christlikeness, reflected in a Spirit-directed, disciplined lifestyle, and demonstrated in redemptive action in our world."
 - A. True
 - B. False
7. The New Testament word for changing the outward appearance is _____.
 - A. *Metamorphoo*
 - B. *Metasche*
 - C. *Morphoo*
 - D. *Hagios*
8. The New Testament word for the conversion of the nature, personality, and character is _____.
 - A. *Metamorphoo*
 - B. *Metasche*
 - C. *Morphoo*
 - D. *Hagios*

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9. The transformation power comes from _____.
- A. God
 - B. self
 - C. theirs
 - D. all of the above
10. The phrase spiritual formation derives from _____.
- A. John 3:16
 - B. Rom. 8:28
 - C. Rev. 3:10
 - D. Gal. 4:19
11. Transformation is _____.
- A. gradual
 - B. instantaneous
 - C. sporadic
 - D. all of the above
 - E. A and B
12. True transformation involves the change of _____.
- A. essential nature
 - B. outward form
 - C. attitude
 - D. actions

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT



NOTES

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. Give a copy of the paper you wrote (see Application—interview, Bible study, key concepts, story telling) to your mentor **before** you meet.
2. Share your findings and insights concerning the transformation of Abraham and/or Joseph.
3. Review the key concepts as they arise from the paper. The mentor should share what the practices of spiritual formation have meant in his/her life.