

# SPRITUAL FORMATION

## INTRODUCTION

Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flows the springs of life.  
Prov.4:23

We live from the heart. The part of us that drives and organizes our life is not the physical. This remains true even if we deny it. You have a spirit within you and it has been formed. Mk.7:14-22 It has taken on a specific character. This is true of everyone. It takes on which ever character it has from the experiences and the choices that we have lived through or made in our past. That is what it means to be formed. This means that the individual and collective disasters that fill the human scene are not imposed upon us from without? That they do not just happen to us. In today's world, individual disasters as well as famine, war, and epidemic are almost totally the the outcome of human choices, which are expressions of the human spirit. And if if there should be an exception to this rule the situation in which we find ourselves is never as important as our response to it. A carefully cultivated heart will, assisted by the grace of God, foresee, forestall, or transform most of the painful situations before which others stand like helpless children saying, "Why?" The Bible is full of wisdom on these matters. If we will just take time to absorb it and build our lives on it. Matt.7:24-25. And so our greatest need is a renovated heart. That place within us from which outlook, choices and actions come has been formed by a world away from God. Mk.7:14-22 Now it must be transformed. Eph.4:17-23 This inner world of the heart is primarily invisible. We usually know very little about the things that move in our own soul, the deepest level of our life or what is driving it. We need God's help in dealing with it. Psa.139:23-24 & Psa.19:13-14.

Jesus is inescapably relevant to human life. About 2000 years ago he gathered his little group of friends and trainees on the Galilean hillsides and sent them out to "teach all nations" – that is to make students (apprentices) to him from all ethnic groups. His objective is eventually to bring all human life on earth under the direction of His wisdom, goodness, and power, as part of God's eternal plan for the universe. He has chosen to accomplish this with and, in part, through his students. This is truly a continuous revolution of the individual human heart or spirit and thus impacting all of human society. It does not depend on outer forms such as social institutions or laws. Rather it is a revolution of character, which proceeds by changing people from the inside through ongoing personal relationship to God in Christ and to one another. It is one that changes their ideas, beliefs, feelings, and habits of choice, as well as their bodily tendencies and social relations. It penetrates the deepest layers of their soul.

Because all other systems are powerless to affect this kind of change Jesus didn't send his students out to promote new forms of government or schools or even Churches. They were to bring the presence of the Kingdom and its King into every corner of human life simply by fully living in the Kingdom with Him. Those who receive Him as their living Lord and constant instructor would be, "God's chosen ones, holy and beloved" Col.3:12 and would learn how to "be blameless and harmless, children of God, faultless in the middle of a twisted and misguided generation, from within they shine as lights in

the world, lifting up a word of life” Phil. 2:15-16 Churches – local assemblies of such people – would be the results.

Students of Jesus realize that His ways are truly the ways of the heart, or spirit. Those who would walk with Jesus must walk with him at the interior level. Not living by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. Counterfeit efforts to bring about the inner and real change of the heart like (Marxism) have failed. Genuine transformation of the whole person into the goodness and power seen in Jesus remains the necessary goal of human life. When Christians fail to appropriate the change (A full renovation of their hearts) available in Christ a low level of Christianity is placed before the general public. Such Christianity does not impart effectual answers to the vital questions of human existence and makes it easier for the counterfeit answers to compete.

Definition: Spiritual formation for the Christian refers to the Spirit-driven process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself. If successful the outer life of the individual becomes a natural expression or outflow of the character and teachings of Jesus. The focus is entirely on Jesus. Its goal is an obedience or conformity to Christ that arises out of an inner transformation accomplished through purposive interaction with the grace of God in Christ. Obedience is an essential outcome of Christian spiritual formation. John 13:34-35;14:21.

External manifestations of Christ likeness is not, however, the focus. When it is made the main emphasis the process will certainly be defeated, falling into deadening legalism, and pointless parochialism. Emphasizing outward and specific acts will merely increase the righteousness of the scribe and Pharisee. True transformation goes beyond that to achieve genuine transformation of who I am through and through. This takes more than human effort, although human effort is certainly indispensable, for spiritual transformation is no passive process. The resources for spiritual transformation extend beyond the human. They come from the interactive presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those who place their confidence in Christ. They also come from the spiritual treasures – people, events, traditions, teachings – God has stored in the body of Christ’s people on earth, past and present. The continuing incarnation of Christ in His people who serve as examples are among the more powerful tools he uses.

Spiritual formation is in practice, the way of rest for the weary and over loaded, of the easy yoke and the light burden. Matt.11:28-30, of cleaning the cup on the inside Matt.23:26, of the good tree that cannot bear bad fruit Lk.6:43. And it is the path along which God’s commandments are found to be not heavy or burdensome 1John 5:3. It is the way of learning to observe all things that I have commanded you within the context of His having all authority in heaven and on earth and being with us every second. Matt.28:16-20. It is impossible to over emphasize the inner dimension of this. Externalizing the process is the primary cause of failure to grow spiritually. For example, it is love itself – not loving behavior, or even the wish or intent to love – that has the power to “always protect, always trust, always hope, put up with anything and never quit” 1Cor.13:7-8. Merely trying to act lovingly will lead to despair and to the defeat of love. It will make us angry and hopeless. But taking love itself – God’s kind of love – into the depths of our being through spiritual transformation will, by contrast, enable us

to act lovingly to an extent that will be surprising even to ourselves, at first. And this love will then become a constant source of joy and refreshment to ourselves and others.

### The present opportunity

The Spirit of God now calls His people to live from an adequate basis for character transformation, resulting in obedience to and abundance in Christ. If we as Christ's people genuinely enter Christ's way of the heart, individuals will find a sure path toward becoming the persons they were meant to be thoroughly good and godly persons, yet purged of arrogance, insensitivity, and self-sufficiency. Christian assemblies will become what they have been in many periods of the past and what the world desperately calls for today; incomparable schools of life (IDC's) life that is eternal in quality now, as well as unending in quantity. This is possible because the spirit and inner being of the human, as well as the process of its renovation in Christ, is an orderly realm where, even in the disorder of its brokenness, God has provided a methodical path of recovery. Grace does not rule out method, nor method grace. Grace thrives on method and method on grace. Spiritual formation in Christ is therefore not a mysterious, irrational, or hysterical process; something that strikes like lightning, whenever and wherever it will, if at all. Spiritual formation is something we human beings can and must understand -- as individuals and in fellowship with other apprentices of Jesus. While it is simultaneously a profound manifestation of God's gracious action through his Word and Spirit, it is also something we are responsible for before God and can set about achieving in a sensible, systematic manner.

### Care requires understanding

Understanding is the basis for care. If you are going to care for something you must understand it, whether it is a plant or a nation. If you would care for your spiritual core -- your heart or will -- you must understand it.

The terms heart, spirit, and will are words that refer to one and the same thing, but they do so under different aspects. Will, refers to that component's power to initiate, to create, to bring about what did not exist before. Spirit refers to its fundamental nature as distinct and independent from physical reality. And heart, refers to its position in the human being as the center or core.

The human heart, will, or spirit is the executive center of a human life where decisions and choices are made. "Like a city that is broken into and without walls is a man who has no control over his spirit. Prov.25:28 see also Jer.17:10 Our societies reflect the divided and conflicted hearts of its individual members. When successful spiritual formation unites the divided heart and life so that that person can bring remarkable harmony into the group where he or she participates. The ideal is integrity where all of the essential parts are effectively organized around God, as they are restored and sustained by Him. Or the fulfillment of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> commands.

Some necessary foundations:

No spiritual transformation will take place as long as we fail to acknowledge our complete and total spiritual bankruptcy. Until we do that we are always going to be tempted to prove ourselves, not knowing that the only thing we will prove is Rom.7:18. Also, we will be in danger of seeing education, socialization, and training as means of reforming the heart.

Real restoration, real transformation is possible, but it begins with Self-denial or Death to Self. Self denial should never be confused with self rejection; nor is it to be thought of as and painful and strenuous act. Luke 9:23-25, Mark 8 35-36. Being dead to self is the condition where the mere fact that I do not get what I want does not surprise or offend me and has no control over me. George Mueller of Bristol, said, "There was a day when I died: died to George Mueller, his opinion preferences, tastes and will; died to the world, its approval or censure; died to the approval or blame even of my brethren or friends. Some sensitivity to the old self will remain and therefore it is necessary to take up our cross daily.

We need to quit categorizing sin. Recently a prominent leader "blew up" or became uncontrollably angry. This was embarrassing, but it is accepted (if not acceptable) behavior; and in this case, it was the one who was questioning him who was chastised. Malfeasance with money is less acceptable than anger, and sexual misconduct is less tolerated still. While all kinds of relational sins go completely unnoticed.

We also need to recognized and accept that manipulation, power structures, paternalism, and pedantry have no place in affecting spiritual growth or formation.

We also should recognized that transformation of our inner being is as much or more a gift of grace as is our justification and that all boasting is to be excluded. Of course neither one is wholly passive. We need to appropriate grace 1Cor.15:10; 2Cor.6:1. In fact it can be said that we consume the most grace by leading a holy life, a life that must be continually upheld by grace.

### The General Pattern of Personal Growth

1. Vision: We need to have some idea of what it would be like and why it would be desirable. Eg. Language learning. Most Americans have little or no vision for language learning. However, multitudes around the world have a clear and strong vision of how their lives could be improved by the knowledge of English. Which explains the phenomenal rate at which English is learned often in difficult and distracting circumstances.
2. Intention: Personal transformation is not going to succeed by accident, drift, or imposition. Effective action has to involve order, subordination, and progression. That is we must initiate, and bring into being those factors that would bring the vision to reality.
3. Means or Instrumentalities. Again to use the illustration of language learning, you sign up for instruction, buy books and tapes, associate with people who speak the language, and practice, practice, and practice some more.

## Transforming the Mind

As we first turned away from God in our thoughts, so it is in our thoughts that the first movements toward the renovation of the heart occur. Thoughts are the place where we can and must begin to change. There the light of God first begins to move upon us through the word of Christ, and there the divine Spirit begins to direct our will to more and more thoughts that can provide the basis for choosing to realign ourselves with God and His way.

Thoughts are all the ways in which we are conscious of things, including memories, perceptions, and beliefs. Our power over our thoughts is of great and indispensable assistance in directing and controlling our feelings. Our ability to think enables us to bring vast ranges of reality and non-reality before us. We can envision what is the case and what is not. Our ability to plan for the future must run ahead of reality. This ability to think, imagine, believe or guess sets boundaries to what we can will or choose or create. Ideas are very general models about reality. They are patterns of interpretation, historically developed and socially shared. They are pervasive and essential to how we approach life and we are often not even aware of their presence. Our idea system is a cultural artifact, growing up with us out of the teachings, expectations, and observable behaviors of family and community. It is very difficult to recognize which ideas are governing our lives because we identify our governing ideas with reality pure and simple.

Our basic need is to replace in ourselves those idea systems of evil with the idea system that Christ embodied and taught and with a culture of the kingdom of God. Every ideas system is present among us as a life force through a small number of images. Eg. The cross. More than any thing our concept of God needs to change. Is God depriving us by his commands of what is good or is he facilitating our good? A right conception of God is basic not only to theology but to practical Christian living. Our ideas concerning ourselves also play a major role. Those who suffer from a poor self-image are caught up in self-rejection and have no defenses against group pressures. Henri Noumen says, "Success, popularity and power can indeed present a great temptation, but their seductive quality often come from the way they are part of a much larger temptation of self-rejection. Self-rejection is the greatest enemy of the spiritual life because it contradicts the sacred voice that calls us the 'Beloved'. Being the Beloved constitutes the core truth of our existence. But this truth will have little or no effect without powerful images of ourselves as God's beloved. Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so is the only complete answer to the false and destructive images and ideas that control the life of those away from God. God's grace will be with us every step of the way as we rebuild our thought processes, but it will never allow us to be passive. We need to get into to his Word in order to acquire an adequate knowledge of God. My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Hosea 4:6 and A people without understanding comes to ruin. 4:14.

We need to think and avail ourselves of God's truth. John 8:31-32. To search out what must be true, or what cannot be true in the light of given facts or assumptions. To extend the information we have to enable us to see the larger picture. To see it clearly and wholly. To take in the information of Scripture into a mind thinking straight under the direction and empowerment of the Holy Spirit is to place our feet solidly on the high of spiritual formation under God. To bring the mind to dwell intelligently upon God as

he is presented in his Word will have the effect of causing us to love God passionately, and this love will in turn bring us to think of God steadily. In this way we enter a life of worship. Worship is the single most powerful force in completing and sustaining restoration in the whole person. It naturally arises from thinking rightly of God on the basis of revealed truth, confirmed in experience. Worship is at once the overall character of the renovated thought life and the only safe place for a human to stand.

J.B. Phillips, "Your God is too small to meet your needs, too small so that you can fail to relentlessly worship and adore Him." We need to stand before God and welcome him into our lives. 2Cor.3:18 This is especially important when we are confronted with evil. Do we allow our view of evil to determine my view of God and diminish him accordingly or do I allow my view of God to determine my view of evil and elevate Him accordingly accepting that nothing is beyond his power for good?

Dangers to be aware of:

1. Pride and overconfidence in ideas, images, having things figured out. Arrogance of doctrine, or tradition is still arrogance.
2. Ignorance: We should live in an attitude of constant openness and learning.
3. Desires: We need to guard against desires guiding our thinking.
4. The western concept of freedom: You cannot choose conditions and reject the consequences.

Finally:

1. Phil.4:8
2. Regular interaction with God
3. Discipline especially scripture memory is important
4. Use correct and positive images
5. Find good role models

Transforming Feelings

We do not need to be mastered by feelings. Whether it is anger, fear, sexual attraction, desire for food, or looking good, feeling wounded, or whatever. But we should not be deceived into taking a strategy of trying to meet our feelings head on and resisting them instead of that of not having them or changing them or replacing them. Those who let God be God get off the conveyor belt of emotion and desire when it first starts to move toward the buzz saw of sin. The proper course of action is to replace destructive feelings with others that are good, or to subordinate them – anger and lust for example – in away that makes them constructive and transforms their effects. The process of spiritual formation in Christ will do this by grace. We must learn to choose and act with regard to the condition, good or bad, and allow for feelings to take care of themselves, as they certainly will. Feelings can be successfully reasoned with and can be corrected by reality in those who have the habit and are given to the grace of listening to reason.

In today's world where we have so much choice people get use to doing what they feel like doing. This can easily lead to addiction. The addict is one who, in one way or another, has given in to feeling of one kind or another and has placed it in the position

of ultimate value in his or her life. Being accepted in the beloved, Eph.1:6 is the indispensable foundation for the reconstruction of positive feelings, and moods. We need to with divine assistance cultivate the feelings that should be prominent in our lives.

1. Love, joy, peace ... Gal.5:22 Joy and peace are basic elements of our transformation into Christ likeness. John 14:27, 15:11, 16:24,16:33. Full joy and peace is our first line of defense against feelings of weakness, failure, disease of mind or body. It gives us strength. Neh.8:10. Even though the Holy Spirit wants to give us joy and peace, Rom 15:13, 1Thess.1:6, Rom.14:17 we must not be passive and allow joy to dissipate by looking backward at our sins and failures, or forward at what might happen to us, or inward at our struggles with work and responsibilities, temptations, and deficiencies. We need to actively look to the greatness and goodness of God and what He wants to do in our lives and learn to be content. Phil.4:11-14.
2. Faith (confidence) hope. Seeing the reality of the unseen. 2Cor.4:16-18; Rom.5:1-5
3. Love: The feeling that I am loved and completely cared for by God. Psa.1. Not prided which is defined by desire, the presumption that my desires should be fulfilled and that is an injustice, a crying shame, and an injury if they are not. Love casts out fear. Lust and pride all around us inevitably result in a world of fear. For they bring us into a world of little dictators; and the most likely thing is that each person will be used and abused by others, possibly destroyed, and at least not helped and cared for.

Practically speaking:

1. We need to come to terms with what our actual feelings are.
2. Not allow feelings to be the boss of action or choice.
3. Replace negative feelings with positive ones.

Transforming the Will and Character

What we think is very much a matter of what we allow ourselves to think, and what we feel is also very much a matter of what we allow ourselves to feel. Moreover what we think and feel is largely a matter of what we desire to think and feel. The condition of the mind is very much a matter of the direction in which our will is set.

The will is very much dependant of the thoughts and feelings of our past that have entered into our character as habits. But the will can change the thoughts and feelings that are to be available to it in future choices. It is because of this that we are responsible for our character. Our character is that internal, overall structure of the self that is revealed by our long run patterns of behavior and from which our actions more or less automatically arise. It develops from specific willings that then become habitual. Character is most revealed by what we feel and do without thinking. To a lesser extent it is revealed in what we repent of after thinking and what we do a result of repenting. Thought, feeling, and will give rise to character.

In the past a focused and coherent will was assumed to be necessary to human freedom, today the assumption is that freedom only comes with an incoherent will and

vagrant will. Truth is regarded as bondage and a rigorous identity as a prison, that prevents me from endlessly re-creating myself.

Steps in transforming the will:

1. Surrender: When we surrender our will to God we consent to his supremacy in all things. This may be something we do grudgingly resulting in grumbling and complaining as well as in all kinds of attempts to manipulate God, people and circumstances.
2. Abandonment: We go a step further and begin believing Rom.8:28-30. Pain and suffering does not turn to disappointment and bitterness.
3. Contentment: Complete identification with the will of God as being good, acceptable and perfect. Gratitude and joy are the steady tone of our lives.
4. Participation: Beyond contentment lies intelligent, energetic seeking to participate with God in what he is doing. We embrace our circumstances in a spirit of meekness and brokenness no matter how tragic they may seem, and act for the good in a power beyond ourselves. We reign in life (exercising dominion) through Christ Jesus. Our tiny will power is not the strength. We hardly notice any exercise of it, though it is fully dedicated to carrying out God's purposes in every respect. This is the real meaning of Gal.2:20.

Spiritual disciplines are very helpful for us to begin dealing with the fact of our fallen character and its need to be completely renovated. Learning to really listen to God, to walk in the light, will reveal layer upon layer of habitual self-deception and rationalization. Typically the enslaved will will have coerced the mind to conceal or rationalize what is really going on. Your mind will really talk to you when you begin to deny fulfillment to your desires, and you will find how subtle and shameless it is.

Do we then lose ourselves? Not at all, to have no will is impossible. Rather for the first time we begin to have a will that is fully functional and not at war with itself. A will that is capable of directing all of the parts of the self in harmony with one another under the direction of God. Real and true inner rest and peace is now possible.

Transforming the Body

1Cor.6:19-20, Rom.8:13

Through spiritual transformation our bodies must increasingly be poised to do what is good and refrain from evil. The inclinations to wrongdoing that literally inhabit its parts must be eliminated. The body must come to serve us as a primary ally in Christ likeness. We should cherish and care for our bodies, not as our master, but as a servant (temple) of God.

The human being living apart from God naturally if not inevitably begins to worship the body and live a life of sensuality. Rom.1. The body becomes the primary source of gratification and the chief, if not the only instrument in getting what we want. My body is the primary place of MY dominion and MY responsibility. It is only through it that I have a world in which to live. It becomes essential to my identity. My life experiences come to me through my body. The difference aspects of my character also



reside in fairly specific parts of our body, and reveal themselves to others through body language. Our posture, the lines on our face, etc. etc.

Col.3 and Rom.5-8 have a lot to say to us about the renewing of the body. God's grace provides an alternative to the merely natural forces (flesh). Especially look at Rom.6:11-19. The proper retraining and nurturing of the body is essential to Christ likeness. The body is not just a physical thing. As it matures, it increasingly takes on the quality of the inner life. That is, the body increasingly becomes a major part of the hidden source from which we live our lives. For example, the tongue needs to be consciously and eventually habitual subjected to the grace of God and used as an instrument for God to do his will, that grace comes literally to inhabit and govern it. Jam.3, Prov. 10:20, 15:4. So to the eyes, the feet, the stomach, the genitals, etc. need transformation.

Practical steps:

1. Release surrender our bodies as a living sacrifice. Your body doesn't belong to you, it has been loaned to you. You are to be a good steward of your body.
2. No longer idolize the body. That is no longer make it an object of ultimate concern. Following Christ could take you into situations where you may get killed. That's OK follow Christ, your body is his to do with it whatever he wants.
3. Stop misusing your body. As a source of sensual gratification, and as an instrument to dominate or manipulate others. Quit over working.
4. Properly honor and care for your body. Nutrition, exercise, and rest are the main essentials to proper care. The practical center of proper care for the body is the Sabbath. The capacity to simply be, to rest, would remove one from most of the striving that leads to misery. This is a capacity that comes to fullness only when it reaches our body. Peace is a condition of the body, and until it has enveloped our body it has not enveloped us. Peace comes to our body when it is at home in the rightness and power of God.

Sabbath fulfilled in human life is really a celebration of God. Sabbath is inseparable from worship, and indeed, genuine worship is Sabbath. Sabbath as the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment is in practice the fulfillment of the first three. When we come to the place where we can joyously, "do no work" it will be because God is so exalted in our minds and bodies that we can trust him with our life and our world and can take our hands off them. Now for most of us Sabbath is first to be achieved in the practice of solitude and silence. These must be carefully sought, cultivated, and dwelt in. When they become established in our soul and our body, they can be practiced in company with others. But the body must be weaned away from its tendencies to always take control, to run the world, to achieve and produce, to attain gratification. These are its habitual tendencies learned in a fallen world. Progress in the opposite direction can only be made in solitude and silence, for they "take our hands off our world" as nothing else does. And that is the meaning of Sabbath.

Rest is one primary mark of the condition of Sabbath in the body as unrest is a primary mark of its absence. So if we really intend to submit our bodies as living sacrifices to God, our first step well might be to start getting enough sleep. Sleep is a good first use of solitude and silence. It is also a good indicator of how thoroughly we trust in God. "I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the Lord sustains me" Psa.3:5-6 "In

peace I will both lie down and sleep, for Thou alone, O Lord, dost make me to dwell in safety. Psa.4:8 Of course that does not mean that we can sleep or way to sainthood. Sometimes people sleep and sleep too much for the wrong reasons. Nor does it mean that godly people do not work hard and are never exhausted. 2Cor.6:5 But those who have separated and consecrated their bodies to God have resources not at the disposal of the ordinary person running on fumes and promises.

If we are not rested the body moves to the center of our focus and makes its presence more strongly felt, and the tendencies of its parts call out more strongly for gratification. The sensual desires and ego demands will have greater power over us through our desperate body parts. In addition our awareness of what it is doing – it is very subtle – and what is happening around us will be less sharp and decisive. Confusion is the enemy of spiritual orientation. Rest, properly taken, gives clarity to the mind. Weariness by contrast, can make us seek gratification and energy from food or drugs, or from various illicit relationships, or from egoistic postures. They pull us away from reliance upon God and from living in His power.

### Transformation of Our Social Dimension

The natural condition of life for human beings is one of reciprocal rootedness in others. Assurance of others being for us is the condition of stable healthy living. If it is not present, we are but walking wounded and our life more or less a shambles until we die. Ultimately every human circle is doomed to dissolution if it is not caught up in the life of the only genuinely self-sufficient circle of the trinity.

Mal.4:6

In the world away from God people experience alienation that leaves them disconnected to others at levels of the soul where lack of nourishment from deep connections with others means spiritual starvation and loss of wholeness in every dimension. This means that woundedness is the starting point for our social transformation. Two things poison our social dimension. Assault or attack and withdrawal or distancing. We assault others when we act against what is good for them even with their consent. The last 6 commands are all telling us not to assault others.

The nature of personality is inherently communal, and only the trinity does justice to what personality is.

Larry Crabb, “When two people connect, something is poured out of one and into the other that has power to heal the soul of its deepest wounds and restore it to health. The one who receives experiences the joy of being healed. The one who gives knows the even greater joy of being used to heal. Jesus Christ makes that kind of connecting possible. In the body of Christ that kind of connecting should be routine. But in order for us to do our part in the process of spiritual formation of social relations we must understand what is wrong. It is as mentioned assault and withdrawal. Which expresses itself in envy and displeasure, in feelings of resentment and contempt, as well as in subtle forms of theft, lying, murder, adultery, and covetousness. It begins in the parent child relationship. Failure to honor father and mother disrupts the human soul and makes dysfunctional people as nothing else does.

Our epidemic of addictions and dysfunctions may well be related to the fact that we are constantly in the presence of people who are withdrawn from us and in many

cases explicitly reject us. Peoples desperate need for approval and for positive attention drives them to do all kinds of foolish things. A couple of hours of carefully calibrated distance in a church setting does nothing to help, and may only enforce the patterns of withdrawal the permeate our fallen world. Of course marriage is almost impossible and seldom successful given these facts. People are incapable of “for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and nurture, to cherish, till death do us part”. It is of course that kind of a marriage that makes for a home and an environment of security and love for children.

So to heal the open sore of social existence, we must start with the marriage relationship – or more inclusively, with how men and women are together in our world. Consequently spiritual formation and all our efforts as Christians to minister to people must focus on this humanly most central relationship.

#### Practical Steps:

1. For the individual to see themselves whole as God sees them in Christ. Such a vision (Rom.8:28-32) sets them beyond the wounds and limitations they have received in their past relationships to others. It is this vision of oneself from God’s point of view that makes it possible to regard oneself as “blessed” no matter what has happened. God has a plan for each of us in the work he is doing during our lifetime, and no one can prevent this from being fulfilled if we place our hope entirely in him. It is this God-given vision of us as whole in Him that draws all the poisons from our relationships to others and enables us to go forward with sincere forgiveness and blessing toward them. Only in this way can we stand free from the wounds of the past and from those who have assaulted or forsaken us.
2. We must abandon all defensiveness. This includes a willingness to be know in our most intimate relationships for who we really are. It includes abandonment of all practices of self-justification, evasiveness, and deceit, as well as manipulation. It doesn’t mean imposing all the junk on others, but it does mean not hiding and not following strategies for “looking good”.
3. Getting rid of all pretense. As Christ’s apprentices we can then carry out our responsibilities in the group or body of Christ, with a grace and power that is not from ourselves, but from God. Rom.12:6-8. and each one would be exhibiting the qualities outlined in Rom.12:9-21.
  - a. Letting love be completely real
  - b. Abhorring what is evil.
  - c. Clinging to what is good
  - d. Being devoted to one another in love
  - e. Outdoing one another in giving honor
  - f. Serving the Lord with ardent spirit and all diligence
  - g. Rejoicing in hope
  - h. Being patient in troubles
  - i. Being devoted to constant prayer
  - j. Contributing to the needs of the saints
  - k. Pursuing hospitality

- l. Blessing persecutors and not cursing them
- m. Share joys and sorrows
- n. Living in harmony with each other
- o. Not being haughty
- p. Not seeing yourself as wise
- q. Never repaying evil for evil
- r. Having due regard for what everyone takes to be right
- s. Being at peace with everyone, so far as it depends on you
- t. Never taking revenge, but leaving that to God
- u. Providing for needy enemies
- v. Not being overwhelmed by evil, but overwhelming evil with good

These are the details of what spiritual transformation of the social dimension looks like. To be a part of a group of disciples living out the above list what have an enormous impact on marriages, families and on our communities.

- 4. Opening up our broader social dimension to redemption. Trusting the Lord to enter all of our interactions with people in such a way, “That rivers of living water flow from us” John 7:38 and that that water will be a “well of water springing up to eternal life” See also Isa.58:11

#### Transformation of the Soul

Putting it all together at the deepest level is the transformation of the soul. Its at the soul level that we rightfully talk about universal human needs. Such as meaning, identity, purpose, justice, full joy, satisfaction, contentment, peace, etc. It is at this level that we must encounter God who alone is the complete and sufficient source of all that we need.

#### Steps:

- 1. Humility: All that we are and have comes from God period. Accepting His wisdom, justice and sovereignty without question. Abandoning all out comes to Him.
- 2. Accepting His yoke: Matt.11:28-30 Finding and fulfilling our God given purpose and calling in life. See Clarifying your calling. We should clarify our calling as early as possible and periodically review it for on going clarity.
- 3. Wholehearted embracing the law of the Lord. Psa.1:2 “His delight is in the law of the Lord. Psa. 119:97, “Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.” Psa.19: “The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul.” The presence of the Spirit and grace is not meant to set the law aside, but to enable conformity to it form an inwardly transformed personality. One whose aim is anything less than complete obedience to the law of God in the Spirit and power of Jesus will never have a soul at rest in God and will never advance significantly in spiritual transformation into Christ likeness.