

What Is Spiritual Formation?

By Scott Aniol

Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

Turn to the comments related to 2 Peter 1:3-4 in the section **It's in the Book**. After reading the comments about verse 4, read Ephesians 4:24. Prepare to share your answer to the following question: How can this verse help you understand what “partakers of the divine nature” means?

Assignment Two

Compare the qualities listed in 2 Peter 1:5-8 with the qualities in Colossians 3:12-14 and the “fruit of the Spirit” in Galatians 5:22-23. Prepare to share your answer to the following question: What qualities are similar and which are different?

Assignment Three

Read Acts 2:42. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: To what were the earliest Christians devoted? How did these disciplines form them spiritually?

Scripture to Memorize

“Train yourself for godliness.” 1 Timothy 4:7

Session Goal

Consistent with God’s Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit - by the end of this session, disciples will recognize the importance of nurturing spiritual virtues in their lives through disciplined training and commit to pursuing such training.

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It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

What does it take to become better at a sport or a musical instrument? Is it automatic, or does it take work? How is this different from or similar to becoming a better Christian?

What Does It Mean to Be Spiritually Formed?

Read 2 Peter 1:1-11 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 3. His divine power. The power of Christ - the same power that raised Him from the dead - is the source of God's divine gift to those who have faith in Him. **granted.** This word demonstrates the certainty of this divine gift from Christ. **life.** The first part of the divine gift refers to our new birth. **godliness.** The second part of the gift literally means "well worship" and is often translated "piety." This is a heart of love and obedience to God and His directives. **through the knowledge of Him.** The divine gift of life and godliness comes through a personal knowledge of Christ.

Verse 4. so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature.

The result of the divine gift is the impartation of a new nature by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, enabling Christians to share in the moral nature of God and to enjoy a spiritual relationship with God. **having escaped from the corruption.** The other result of the divine gift is that believers can escape sinful corruption. These two results describe the essence of spiritual formation: a life that is progressing in relationship with God and freedom from sin.

Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** may now report on how Ephesians 4:24 sheds light on the meaning of "partakers of the divine nature."

Discussion Question

What does it mean to be spiritually formed and how does it relate to your salvation and relationship with Christ?

Studying the Passage

Verse 5. make every effort. Since we are partakers of the divine nature, Christ has enabled us to live godly lives, but nurturing the Christian life still takes effort, diligence, and hard work.

Peter then lists important spiritual qualities every Christian needs to nurture. **virtue.** This literally means "that which properly fulfills its purpose or function." **knowledge.** The second quality is practical knowledge, the ability to discern between right and wrong.

Verse 6. self-control. The third quality is the inner power to control your physical

passions instead of being controlled by them. **perseverance**. The next quality literally means to bear up under a heavy load. **godliness**. The fifth quality refers to piety and reverence for God.

Verse 7. brotherly affection. Loving one another is an essential characteristic of Christianity we must actively add to our faith. **love**. The greatest Christian virtue is more than simply mutual brotherly kindness. This is sacrificial, deliberate, purposefully seeking the welfare of others. Verses 8-9 describe the effects of this kind of spiritual growth.

Verse 8. increasing. Spiritual formation is a continual process of growth. **ineffective or unfruitful**. Christians who actively nurture these spiritual qualities will progressively grow in their personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Verse 9. whoever lacks these qualities. Those who do not nurture these qualities are like someone with bad sight or a bad memory. They will have no confidence about their relationship with God.

Verse 10. diligent to confirm. Peter is once again emphasizing that spiritual formation requires faithful effort of every Christian. **never fall**. Diligently nurturing Christian virtue will make Christians “sure-footed” about their relationship with God.

Verse 11. richly provided for you an entrance. As spiritual qualities increase more and more in this life, blessings and rewards will increase more and more in the life to come.

Assignment Two Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Two** may now report on the similarities and differences between the qualities listed in 2 Peter 1:5-8 and those in Colossians 3:12-14 and Galatians 5:22.

On Your Own

In the space below, list some spiritual qualities you believe you are growing in and list some other spiritual qualities you believe you lack. When everyone is finished, the group can share their responses.

What Does It Take to Be Spiritually Formed?

Read 1 Timothy 4:7-10 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 7. train yourself. We get the English word *gymnastics* from the Greek word translated “train yourself.” Spiritual formation requires disciplined, active training.

Verse 8. of value in every way. The results of diligent spiritual formation are eternal.

Assignment Three Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Three** may now report on the early Christian disciplines in Acts 2:42.

Discussion Question

What spiritual disciplines has God prescribed in Scripture that help Christians nurture spiritual virtues? How is actively pursuing spiritual virtue through disciplined training similar to developing a sports skill or musical talent?

On Your Own

Choose one spiritual discipline you discussed earlier that you will commit this week to pursuing diligently and write it in the space below. List a few deliberate ways you will pursue this discipline. Finally, list the spiritual virtues you believe this discipline will help form. When everyone is finished, the group can share their responses.

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below and then be ready to share that with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Give the group this update: “In our last session I made a commitment to . . . I want to let you know how that turned out. On that same issue, I think the Holy Spirit now is leading me to . . .”

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Disciples can agree on a way to hold one another accountable. Confessing faults with other disciples allows them to offer grace, insights and encouragement. Even more important is confession to Christ, the source of true forgiveness and cleansing.

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Groups of disciples always are making preparations for evangelism, missions and service. Use these minutes to work on the next plan.

Prayer

7 minutes

Every disciple will pray aloud, offering praise to Jesus, thanking Him specifically for His gracious acts, making heartfelt confession, committing to actions flowing from the Bible study, praying toward evangelism locally and globally and interceding for others as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

At Home: Nail It Down

Through a relationship with Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, God has given every Christian new life, a new nature and the ability to flee from sin and walk in godliness (2 Peter 1:3-4; Ephesians 4:24). Yet, even though this process of spiritual growth is inevitable for true Christians, it is not automatic. Spiritual formation requires disciplined effort (2 Peter 1:5; 1 Timothy 4:7). Such effort is motivated by love and adoration of Jesus. It also is motivated by gratitude for Christ's sacrifice and the gift of salvation.

The goal of this effort is that Christians will cultivate important virtues in their lives like moral excellence, discernment, self-control, perseverance, godliness, kindness and love (2 Peter 1:5-7; Colossians 3:12-14; Galatians 5:22). Nurturing these qualities draws Christians closer in their relationship with Christ and allows them to live fruitful lives that are glorifying to Him (2 Peter 1:8-10).

The way God has established for Christians to nurture these spiritual virtues is through biblically prescribed spiritual disciplines such as Bible reading, prayer and worship (Acts 2:42). Every Christian should commit to making habits of these disciplines, not as ends in themselves but toward the goal of a great relationship with God and with His people.

Follow-Up Question

What spiritual discipline have you committed to pursuing this week and how will it help form Christian virtue?

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.