

Spiritual Formation

September 24th 2006

Introduction:

Over the last several weeks we have studied four key components of our spiritual formation (commission, compassion, community, and encountering Christ). Each of these is centered on God and geared to help us be formed into the people God wants us to be.

Which has been the most challenging for you (Living the Commission, Impacting Through Compassion, Finding Community, or Encountering the Christ?) Why?

God is the only one who can transform us spiritually. It is only by his hand that our formation takes place. God's primary goal for our lives is for spiritual formation. He doesn't want us to be who we used to be. There is a change in our lives. This process requires God's shaping hand to be in contact with our lives. Jeremiah talks about God forming and shaping his people much like a potter forming a clay pot.

God as the Potter:

Jeremiah 18:1-6

What significance is there in God being the potter and our lives the clay?

- God has a plan for what he wants to make us.
- Clay does not have the power to form itself. God has the power to make us who he wants us to be.
- The clay has to yield to the hand of the potter.

Why does God as the potter know what is best for us?


- He knows what he wants the clay to be and what function it will have. He has a design and a purpose.

How do we, as God's vessels, often try to take our lives off of the potter's wheel and away from his forming our lives?

- When we resist his plan for our lives
- When we refuse to confess our sins and repent of them.
- When we no longer allow Him to shape our lives.

We are all being formed. The question is, who is shaping us?

Who or what in your life has played a role in forming you into who you



Holiness in Spiritual Formation:

are today?

- People, media, etc.

God wants us to be formed into a holy community.

1 Peter 1:13-16

What does it mean to “be holy”?

- To be set apart for God’s purposes.

Peter connects the return of Christ with holy living.

How does our hope in Christ’s return motivate us to be holy?

- If we are going to be holy in heaven, we need to be striving to be holy here on earth.
- Because we have a hope set on being with God in heaven, we should be motivated to live holy lives here on earth.

Peter reminds us of our identity – children of God.

How does being God’s children motivate us to be holy?

- We have an identity that is closely tied to God himself, as our father.
- Children should act like their parents. John 8:39 "Abraham is our father," they answered. "If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would do the things Abraham did."
- The old saying goes “like Father like son” and the same should be true of our lives as children of God.

According to Peter, where does holiness come from?

- It comes from God and not from ourselves.

We often tie holiness to our actions. We think we are holy if we do good things and we are not if we do bad things. In other words, doing good makes us holy and doing bad makes us unholy. This is not exactly what scripture says about holiness. Holiness is not a result of our actions. Our actions are a result of our holiness. God makes us holy and then we should live like it.

How is holiness countercultural?

- Our culture does not want us to be set apart spiritually. The world is looking for you to slip up because they think that shows your faith is not genuine.

- Our culture is sinful and unholy. It seeks to pull us down rather than let us lift them up.

Holiness is directly tied to spiritual formation. Just as God freed his people from slavery in Egypt and spent 40 years in the desert forming them into His people, we too have to be set apart to be made into God's holy people.

Paul saw a deep connection between spiritual formation and our identity. Those who are without God are dead and those who belong to God have life. The process of transitioning from death to life involves spiritual formation.

Death to Life:

Romans 6:21-23

What is life like apart from God?

- Characterized by shame and death

How does being connected with God lead to holiness?

- The righteousness that comes from God makes us holy.

What does Paul say is a result of that holiness?

- Eternal life

Once we have been brought to life through Jesus Christ, our lives are given over to His forming hand.

Conforming vs. Transforming

Romans 12:1-2

In the Old Testament, sacrifices were burned and the aroma was pleasing to God. These animals were devoted to God. When the sacrifice was done, there was not much left of the animal. An animal could only be sacrificed once.

How are we different, as living sacrifices, than a sacrifice that can only be used once?

- As living sacrifices, our lives are continually devoted to God.
- Being a living sacrifice means our lives offer a continual aroma to God – either pleasing or unpleasing.

"Aroma" was a term closely associated with worship that is pleasing to God.

How can our lives be a pleasing aroma to God?

- When we live holy lives we are pleasing to Him.
- When we reach out to others, show compassion, and be who he wants us to be we are pleasing to Him.

God seeks our transformation. He does not want us to be conformed to this world. Conformity to this world leads to death. Spiritual transformation is what God wants in our lives. Not just the transformation of our actions but the transformation of our identity. He wants us to be His people.

Application:

How does God's call to holiness make our lives different than they currently are?

What are some things you can do this week that will be a pleasing aroma to God?

What could you take out of your life that would allow God to shape you better on his potter's wheel?

Put it into Practice:

Let God transform your relationships one person at a time. Take one person you normally have a difficult time with and find ways to let your attitude toward them have a pleasing aroma with God. We want all of our life to pass the "smell test" with God as we let him transform our lives.

Note to Leaders:

Make sure to continue to emphasize the need to invite others to our groups. Our goal is not to be the community's "best kept secret" but to be in contact with people who need transformation in their lives. Thank you for all you do.