



*Christian Spiritual Formation:
An Integrated Approach for
Personal and Relational
Wholeness*

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What Is Christian Spiritual Formation?

Christian Spiritual Formation (CSF) is defined as an interactive process by which God the Father fashions believers into the image of his Son, Jesus, through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit by fostering development in seven primary life dimensions (spirit, emotions, relationships, intellect, vocation, physical health and resource stewardship). Through refining the scope of CSF, I offer these seven life dimensions because they are universally shared across cultures as being those in which the human person is both inherently endowed and capable of exercising autonomy for personal growth and development. Further, for believers to be Christ's ambassadors (2 Cor 5:20), I argue that these seven dimensions are intended by God to coalesce into an ethical lifestyle that witnesses to the unbelieving world of God's redeeming love.

Formation of the spirit relates to our faith journey as the grace-based, interactive process of nurture and growth of the human spirit as it is conformed to the image of Jesus and overseen by the Father through the indwelling Holy Spirit in the context of the believing community. All other formation dimensions predicate on the spiritual dimension.

Emotional formation refers to the process of understanding, expressing and reflecting on our feelings, passions, and desires in productive ways in order to reflect the image and character of Christ and come to terms with past hurts, wounds and bondages that stymie emotional freedom. Emotional formation is integrally tied to the spiritual dimension.

Relational formation relates to how we are conformed continuously into the image of Jesus through social interactions and the life of the church, which invariably are embedded within cultural contexts. Relational formation influences both spiritual and emotional formation, as well as the other dimensions.

Intellectual formation concerns the development of the mind to think, reason and discern truth consonant with the Word of God in order to nurture godly beliefs and a Christ-honoring worldview that reflects biblical knowledge, wisdom and understanding. Intellect develops in conjunction with the preceding three dimensions.

Vocational formation involves the process of being conformed into the image of Jesus in our life calling through the development of God-given giftings, talents, abilities and skills that reflect the grace and glory of God in life and work-related contexts. A sense of life purpose involves the spiritual, emotional, relational and intellectual life dimensions as they interact across time.

Physical health formation pertains to the care of our physical bodies, which Paul identifies as the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19), in order to maximize our effectiveness in fulfilling

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BOOK EXCERPT



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our life purpose. Physical health underlies each of the preceding formation dimensions. We cannot be fully formed without taking into consideration the body, which sustains the other six dimensions.

Resource formation relates to the wise stewardship of the earth, finances, material possessions and time in order to bring maximum glory to God. Resource formation expresses a confluence of the other six dimensions.

For Christians the ultimate goal of CSF is to become more like Jesus in order to reflect God's glory. Just as most parents want their children to resemble them, God also desires that we grow into the image of Jesus by becoming like him. Paul's injunction to the Ephesians to be imitators of God and to live in love succinctly sums up CSF (Eph 5:1-2). As Jason Hood explains, Paul's view of imitation with an emphasis on conformity to Christ through the Holy Spirit does not convey "rote mimicry" or mindless copying, but rather lies at the very heart of image bearing and the discipleship journey. Human effort, however, is insufficient for the task. As Michael Gorman contends, imitation of Christ reflects "Christ's formation in believers," not the result of self-assertion but rather of the Spirit's working within to produce Christlike character. This holistic transformation through God's redeeming grace is why Jesus came to rescue fallen humanity. As God's children we are nurtured by a loving Father through the person of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit, who in every way is dedicated to our overall growth and development. Affirming this developmental process into Christlikeness, the apostle John stated, "Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is" (1 Jn 3:2).

The good news is that a loving God with abundant grace desires to meet us right where we are. Asking God for grace to intersect our motivations and desires is the entry point for deeper levels of transformation. Grace is the self-giving resource and gift from God that provides favor and enablement to fulfill one's Kingdom purpose. This book addresses how God's grace engages the heart, will and actions in order to communicate divine love and thereby glorify God through each formation dimension as evidenced through godly character and an ethical lifestyle.

— Adapted from the Introduction

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