

Begin with Silence and Prayer (5 Minutes)

Gather together as a community group in a comfortable setting; around a table, on a couch, a living room floor, etc. Have someone lead a quick prayer inviting the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together. Then spend a moment in silence together. Instruct your group,

“As you sit in silence, invite the Holy Spirit to quiet your heart and mind from distractions. Ask God if there is anything he would like to share with you during this time.”

Why silence? In our overcrowded, busy world, silence (even if for only a few minutes) cuts through the noise and allows space to calm your mind and your heart before God. Close this group time of silence with a moment of gratitude, thanking God for the opportunity to be together.

Review “Beyond the Horizon Vision” (5 Minutes)

This week we start a series exploring pillar two of our new “Beyond the Horizon Vision,” Spiritual formation. Below is a graphic that details this vision. Look over and read the chart below to the group. Notice that of the four pillars, this is pillar number two. This past spring, we launched our Worship Pillar and are continuing to grow this area at CPC. This fall, we are launching our second pillar, Spiritual Formation.

<p>In the next ten years, CPC will engage in spiritual formation at a magnitude that will propel us into thoughtful and gracious cultural engagement on the San Francisco Peninsula to ignite both personal and societal transformation.</p>			
TRANSFORMED PEOPLE		TRANSFORMING THE PENINSULA	
<p>Worship is our God–glorifying response to who He is and what He has done.</p>	<p>Spiritual formation is the process of intentionally opening our lives to the work of the Spirit to become more like Christ.</p>	<p>Equipping is preparing all followers of Jesus to serve both inside and outside the walls of the church.</p>	<p>Cultural engagement is thoughtfully and graciously participating in society at all levels so that people can encounter God through our words and works.</p>

Take a few minutes with the group and discuss what excites you about this vision?

Debrief the Teaching (10 minutes)

If you have a large group, it may be best to divide into small groups of three to four people. Spend a moment catching up on life and then talk through the following questions:

- Did you listen to this week’s sermon? What did you think?
- What comes to mind when you think about spiritual formation?

Discuss this Overview (10-15 Minutes)

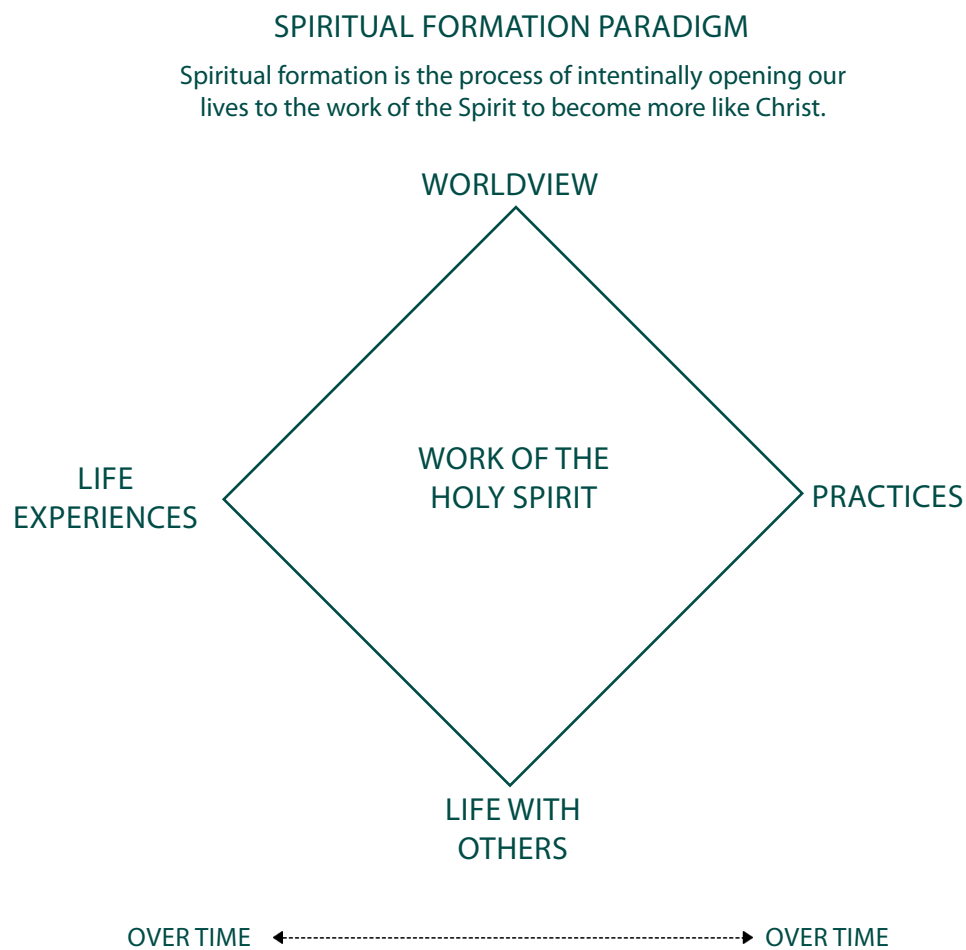
Spiritual formation is not a Christian thing; it's a human thing. To be human is to be dynamic and not static; we are all being formed or shaped. The question, therefore, is not are you a disciple? The question is rather, to whom or what are you a disciple? You are becoming someone. The question is, who are you becoming? The invitation of Jesus is to reimagine the whole of our lives in light of his invitation to follow. This is the life pursuit of the follower of Jesus.

Too often, our understanding of spiritual formation is understood as something we "add on" to our faith. Our spirituality is viewed as a static possession rather than a process of formation that dynamically draws us into an ever-developing growth toward becoming more like Christ. **Spiritual formation, therefore, is the process of intentionally opening our lives to the work of the Spirit to become more like Christ.**

What words or phrases stand out to you about the definition of spiritual formation above?

What are the implications that spiritual formation is not exclusively a Christian thing but a human thing?

Below is a paradigm of what we believe Spiritual Formation is, spend a few minutes looking it over as a group and discussing what you notice.



To intentionally open our lives up to the work of the Spirit means that we intentionally organize all four areas around the diamond to the work of the Spirit. For the next four weeks, we will explore each area in turn and discuss what it would mean to intentionally re-shape that aspect of us toward God for the sake of the Spirit transforming us more into the image of Christ.

Open the Bible Together (10-15 Minutes)

Have someone read John 15.1-8 out loud.

In this text, Jesus uses the metaphor of branches attached to a vine, and it is through this connection to the vine that the branches are able to produce fruit. The metaphor has two particular moments; the gardener pruning the branches (15.1) and the branches and the vine remaining and abiding in one another. Let's look at each moment in turn.

The Gardner's Pruning

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the Gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful." John 15:1-2

The invitation of Jesus to spiritual formation is an invitation to reorganize the whole of your life around Him. This means it will be difficult and require certain things (potentially good things and bad things) to be pruned away in order to "be even more fruitful."

Take a moment and consider the regular, mundane, day-in-day-out things of your life that Jesus may be seeking to prune.

Often times these can be blatant sins that we know are outside the way of Jesus, but many times these can be morally neutral things that simply get in the way of being in the presence of God, e.g. digital distraction, work-life imbalance, a relentless schedule, not getting enough sleep, apathy, binging a Netflix show, etc.

What is a small, simple, achievable step you could take to intentionally move toward this reorganization?

The goal is sustainability, be realistic. Do not try to radically transform every aspect of your life this week. Prayerfully consider one thing that God may be pruning from your life. Discuss with the group what pruning it would look like.

Remaining in the Vine

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." John 15:5

The bulk of Jesus' teaching in this section is on this part of the metaphor. For the branch to thrive, it must remain, which can also be translated as abide, in the source of life, the vine.

What does it mean to "remain" in Jesus?

A branch doesn't plug into the vine occasionally, or connect to the vine once a week to sustain its life for the next six days. Rather, the image is a branch that is continuously connected to the vine at all moments. This is what it means for us to abide in Jesus. It is to learn to live in constant awareness of and connection to the Holy Spirit throughout our days.

Discuss the following quote by Dallas Willard as a group:

"The first and most basic thing we can and must do is to keep God before our minds...This is the fundamental secret of caring for our souls. Our part in thus practicing the presence of God is to direct and redirect our minds constantly to Him. In the early time of our 'practicing' we may well be challenged by our burdensome habits of dwelling on things less than God. But these are habits - not the law of gravity - and can be broken. A new, grace-filled habit will replace the former ones as we take intentional steps toward keeping God before us. Soon our minds will return to God as the needle of a compass constantly returns to the north. If God is the great longing of our souls, he will become the pole star of our inward beings."

Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission*, p. 125.

Something to Practice Individually this Week - Practicing the Presence of God (5-10 Minutes)

Below is a practice that everyone in your group can try out this coming week. Spend a few minutes reading this out loud with the group and discuss any questions that may arise.

The goal of this practice is to cultivate more intentional time where you can "abide in the vine." To do so, let's challenge ourselves to spend intentional time in silence, connecting with the presence of God. Two things will be essential to begin.

1. Identify a specific time/place that works well with your schedule and season of life.

Time: For many people, first thing in the morning is best, you are rested, the entire day is ahead of you. For others, lunch break, after work, or right before bed may be best. You may have to experiment with what time is best for you, so feel free to adjust as the week goes on, but try to pick a time and be consistent.

Place: This can be difficult in our busy and noisy world, but try to find a quiet space that is free from distractions: home office, bedroom, or prayer closet. Again, feel free to experiment throughout the week with where the best place is for you to connect in the quiet with God.

2. Set a modest goal.

If you are new to the idea of sitting in the quiet in God's presence, start small and work your way up. Maybe start at ten minutes three to five days a week.

If you have some experience with this and already have a consistent rhythm, maybe try upping your regular time. Again, the goal is sustainability, so start where you are and seek slow growth.

Now that you have a specific time and place and a modest goal, use the below instructions to guide your time with God over the next week

Step #1 - Remove Distractions

Put away your phone or any other distractions that may hinder you from focusing on God's presence. Get into a comfortable and relaxed position. If you are someone who likes to be in constant motion, consider doing this while on a quiet walk outside.

Step #2 - Start with Prayer

Close your eyes and take a few long breaths (if it helps, count to 4 while breathing in, wait for 4 seconds, and then count to 4 while exhaling.) In our fast-paced world, it can be difficult to slow down and taking a few deep breaths may help with this. As you take those deep breaths, try to quiet the constant chatter in your mind. As thoughts race into your mind, just let them go as fast as they came. Because we are conditioned to the chaos of our world, your mind will grasp the opportunity to run wild from thought to thought. Feelings, to-dos, and distractions will race into your mind. That is okay, don't feel guilty or judge yourself, just notice if your mind starts to wander and say a simple prayer, "God, help me to abide in you now."

Step #3 - Abide in God's Presence

Spend some time praying and thanking God for his presence. Welcome his presence and sit in the quiet with God. If it is helpful, allow a favorite verse to rise to the surface of your mind and meditate on it for a few minutes. But the goal is not to accomplish anything during this time. Simply be with Jesus. Don't rush, and feel guilty about not doing anything, just relax and enjoy the opportunity to be in the presence of God.

Step #4 - End in Gratitude

After whatever amount time you have designated, take a moment to thank God for this time. Spend time in gratitude and resolve to show up again tomorrow with God. Then close and enjoy the rest of the day!

This is not something you can succeed or fail at; all you can do is show up. Be patient and give yourself grace. Resist the urge to be critical of yourself and say, "I'm bad at this" or "this isn't for me." Don't rush to judgment, but rather resolve to simply take one small step toward abiding in the presence of God. This may be different for many of us, and that is okay, just use the intentional time to be with God.

Close in Prayer (5 Minutes)

Have someone close out your time in prayer. Thank God for the time together, and pray for each other's upcoming week.