

Study Guide Questions for *How Christians Grow: Spiritual Transformation for Life*

Chapter 1: What is Spiritual Formation

Summary: Spiritual formation is a Spirit-led and believer-response process whereby individuals and communities grow into ever-greater Christ-likeness in the community of and for the sake of the Church and the world.

1. Spirituality is of immense interest to many people in society, but many don't want anything to do with Christianity or the Church? Why do you think this might be the case? Do you have any friends/ family/ work colleagues who think like this?
2. Read Romans 5:1-5 and Galatians 5:16-26. What sorts of behaviour and thinking would you expect to see as the Holy Spirit increasingly works in a Christian's life?
3. Read 2 Corinthians 3:17-18. The moment someone becomes a Christian they receive the Holy Spirit and begin a journey of being spiritually transformed into the likeness of Jesus (p.2). Could you share something about your own spiritual journey so far?
4. Discuss the following statement: "In Christ our humanity is redeemed and restored to us so that the image of our creator begins to emerge with clarity. In Christ we are reshaped according to the pattern we were created to bear (2 Cor 3:17-18). This reshaping is the basic meaning of spiritual formation – which is synonymous to spiritual growth – and refers to a Christian increasingly reflecting their status of being in-Christ and a child of God" (p.3).
5. Read through the definitions of Christian spiritual formation on pages 5-6. Which one appeals to you the most, and why?
6. "While specific events (e.g. conferences, challenge from Scripture, insights from a mentor, answered prayer) may contribute to a person's spiritual formation, spiritual formation is a process that occurs over time" (p.6). How true has this been from your experience?
7. Spiritual Formation is a Spirit-driven process of *being* conformed rather than conforming *ourselves* to the image of Christ (p.8). Read 1 Corinthians 3:1-7. What role does God play and what role do we and others play in our spiritual growth?
8. Spiritual formation is both individual and corporate (p.10). In what ways can each person here at Emmanuel contribute to the spiritual growth of other people in the church? How might this corporate spiritual growth impact the local school and community in which we minister and serve?

Chapter 2: The Means of Spiritual Formation

Summary: God's plan and purpose for every Christian is that they are conformed to the image of His Son Jesus. When Jesus appears in glory and the Christian receives their new body, that transformation process will be complete. Before then, however, we are on a trajectory of increasing Christlikeness – of growing in godliness. God uses six main ways to bring about growth in godliness: the Holy Spirit, people, circumstances, suffering, practice of Spiritual Disciplines and use of spiritual gifts

1. Read Galatians 5:16-26. “The Spirit is not only an agent for spiritual growth but also a means. Simply having the Spirit doesn’t guarantee spiritual growth. Rather, our response to the Spirit’s influence is what will impact the role of the Spirit as a means for growth” (p.11). If we face a difficult situation in our lives, what might it mean to submit to the will of the Spirit, and alternatively, to resist the Spirit?
2. “People can be instrumental in our spiritual growth, both positively and negatively. Godly pastors, leaders, parents, family members, friends, mentors, congregants and the like can be a source of knowledge, encouragement, support, advice and models for what godliness looks like in practice” (p.12) Who has God used in your life to positively influence your spiritual growth?
3. “Conversely, working with colleagues who frustrate us or let us down, or being the parent of a difficult child, or being mistreated by a family member provide opportunities for us to grow in patience, love, and forgiveness” (p.12) Can you recall a time in your life when this has been the case?”
4. “God can use both positive and negative circumstances as instruments for producing spiritual growth” (p.12). What are some things that have happened in your life that have resulted in a deepening of your relationship with God?
5. Read 2 Corinthians 12:1-10. “While God can use many people and circumstances as part of our spiritual formation, those that lead to suffering have a way of shaping up profoundly in a way that almost nothing else can.” Read James 1:2-3 and 1 Peter 1:6-9. How can God use suffering to make us more like Jesus? How should we respond when we experience suffering?
6. Author Tim Keller says that in our experiences of suffering, anger, rage, and agony, God is right there with us holding us in the injustice – weeping with us. And “when believers in Jesus suffer, he is quite literally with us in our furnace of trouble, in some way actually feeling the flames too” (quoted on p.15-16). How might this thought help us when we are going through a time of suffering?

Chapter 3: Introducing the Spiritual Disciplines

Summary: Spiritual Disciplines are practices found in Scripture that promote spiritual growth in the life of the Christian when practiced with a godly motivation. They include such things as meditating on Scripture, prayer, fasting, worship, solitude, confession, and service.

1. “While the Christian’s transformation into Christ-likeness will be complete at the return of Christ, the consistent refrain of Scripture is that they are not to wait for God’s holiness to descend upon them. Rather, they are to actively pursue godliness (p.18). What might this look like practically (see 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8; 1 Timothy 4:6-10; 1 Peter 1:13-24).
2. Read Galatians 3:1-14. Why doesn’t mere performance of Spiritual Disciplines guarantee that we will grow spiritually? How can you guard against this?
3. What have been some of the ways Christians throughout history have misused the practice of Spiritual Disciplines?

4. Read 2 Peter 1:3-10. The apostle Peter, through the Holy Spirit, writes of making progress in the Christian life (p.23). What are some of those areas? Why should we be making progress in these areas?
5. What has been your experience with practicing any of the Spiritual Disciplines?
6. What questions might you have about any of the Spiritual Disciplines?

Chapter 4: Essential Spiritual Disciplines

Summary: Like breathing in and breathing out, so is meditating on God's Word and responding to His Word in prayer. Both are essential for spiritual growth.

1. Read Hebrews 1:1-4. In the Old Testament God spoke in many different ways. What were some of those ways? In contrast, what does the writer to the Hebrews say about how has God spoken through Jesus and how God speaks today?
2. Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17. How does the Holy Spirit use the Bible as we read and obey it to bring about spiritual growth?
3. An essential spiritual discipline is meditating on God's Word – the Bible. As we read or hear God's Word, God speaks to us. But there is an important difference between reading and meditating. Meditative reading of Scripture is about slowing down our intake of God's Word so that we don't simply read it but actually meditate on it, ruminate on it, savour it, and then respond to what God has said to us through prayer (p.25). What could you do practically to move from simply reading the Bible to meditating on it?
4. Meditating on Scripture is more like savouring a letter from a dear friend than scanning a newspaper. What makes reading 'spiritual' is rather the intention, attitude and manner we bring to spiritual reading that allows God to transform the text from simply being interesting words to being words with the power to change our hearts (p.27-28). Could you share a time when reading and meditating on a passage in the Bible really impacted your life?
5. Author Richard Chin provides some practical tips on Bible reading that can helpfully be applied to our meditative reading of Scripture. His suggestions include: making careful observations from the passage we are reading; jotting down questions we might have from the passage; noticing any repeated words or phrases; noting any surprises in the text; and reflecting on how a particular passage points to Jesus (p.29). What are some other practical ideas you could add?
6. For many Christians, what they read in the Bible and what they pray for are completely separate activities. How might prayer naturally flow from our meditation on Scripture?
7. Would you say you find prayer easy or a bit of a struggle?
8. Read Romans 8:26-27. How does the Holy Spirit help us to pray? (p.31)
9. How does a Christian learn to pray?
10. What tips might you have for someone who wants to grow in this discipline of prayer?

Chapter 5: Further Disciplines of the Christian Life

Summary: While meditating on Scripture and responding in prayer are essential disciplines in the Christian life, there are other spiritual disciplines that Christians have practiced down through the centuries as an aid to spiritual maturity, including: fasting, silence and solitude; confession, service and simplicity.

1. “Christian fasting refers to the voluntary abstinence from food (some would add drink) for spiritual purposes” (p.35). Is fasting as a Spiritual Discipline something you have tried before? Why or why not?
2. Why did people fast in the Bible e.g. you might like to look at 1 Samuel 7:6; 2 Samuel 1:11-12; 1 Kings 21:27-29; Ezra 8:23; Acts 13:3, 14:23.
3. Much of the discussion regarding Christian fasting is centred on the question as to whether fasting is a direct command of Jesus or not, with the two key texts being Matthew 6:16-18 and Matthew 9:14-17 (p.36). Read through these two passages and discuss whether or not Christians should fast?
4. Silence and solitude: Author Kenneth Boa describes how “solitude is the most fundamental of the disciplines in that it moves us away, for a time, from the lures and aspirations of the world into the presence of the Father. In solitude...we discover a place of strength, dependence, reflection, and renewal, and we confront inner patterns and forces that are alien to the life of Christ within us” (p.37). Why might you consider introducing short periods of silence and solitude into your life? What might be some reasons you wouldn’t?
5. Confession: Read 1 Timothy 2:6; 1 John 1:8-9. Protestants have rightly rejected the Catholic theology and practice of the confessional box, with the priest acting as an intermediary between the person and God because there is one mediator between God and people – the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Tim 2:5). If we confess our sins to God the Father, then because of the atoning death of God’s Son Jesus, God the Father is faithful and just and promises to forgive our sins (1 John 1:9). Why then might a Christian confess their sins to a fellow Christian?
6. What might stop a Christian confessing their sins to a fellow believer? (p.40) What things would a person confessing their sins to another be wise to consider first? How comfortable would you feel confessing your sins to another Christian?
7. You are having coffee with a Christian friend who says to you that they still feel guilty for some things from their past despite having repeatedly confessed them to God and asked forgiveness. What would you say to them?
8. Service: Read John 13:1-17. How might acts of service (particularly menial service) grow our character to become more like that of the Lord Jesus (pp.40-41)?
9. What are some ways that you could serve without drawing attention to it?
10. Simplicity: Simplicity is fundamentally about living with less (pp.42-43). How might increasingly embracing a life of simplicity grow your character to be more like of Jesus himself?
11. What things could you give away this week that you don’t need?
12. What is something that you can do to make simplicity a greater part of your life?

Chapter 6: Spiritual Gifts

Summary: Spiritual gifts are supernatural, God-given abilities distributed by God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit to the Christian for the purpose of building up the body of Christ, and unifying and edifying the church.

1. Read Romans 12:6-8, Ephesians 4:11-16, 1 Corinthians 12:1-10. What are some of the spiritual gifts mentioned in these passages? Are there other spiritual gifts that you might be able to be added to these? (pp.48-51)
2. Does every Christian receive at least one spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 12:6-7; Romans 12:6)?
3. Why should Christians not be disappointed with the particular gifts God has given them?
4. What do 1 Peter 4:10-11 and Romans 12:6-8 say about how Christians should use their spiritual gifts?
5. When are spiritual gifts bestowed – at conversion or some other time?
6. What is the difference between natural talents and spiritual gifts? (pp.52-53)
7. What do you think your spiritual gifts are? How can a Christian discover what their spiritual gifts are?
8. Read Mark 10:45, John 13:4-5 and Philippians 2:5-8? What does the example of Jesus teach us about serving? Can we serve in an area even if we aren't gifted in it?
9. "God provides spiritual gifts so that believers can strengthen and encourage one another, for the purpose of God incrementally transforming them into the image of Christ. The Church grows into what God has designed through the godly use of the gifts he has provided" (p.57) How does knowledge and use of spiritual gifts contribute to spiritual growth – both ourselves and others??