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Integrated Plan for Spiritual Formation

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Integrated Plan for Spiritual Formation

Spiritual formation remains highly looked over in today's society. People so easily assume spiritual formation is strongly traditional, likely tied to Catholicism, and they believe that such religious acts are not necessarily for themselves. However, in the more recent years, there seems to be a resurgence of this phrase and what it could contribute to the doctrine and habits of Protestant and Evangelical Christian churches. Are Christians truly living out Christ's call to follow Him? Are Christians embodied, reflections of Christ in the world today? Is genuine life change still occurring in the lives of today's Christians? Such questions or issues arising in the church today reveal the need for a reexamination of spiritual formation and the regenerated new life Christians have upon salvation. May Christians not settle for a cheap salvation and simply a readiness to die but embrace the costly price Christ paid for them and live now as Christ has called his people to.

Dallas Willard reveals the cause of the recent emergence, in many different Christian circles, of the desire to know more about spiritual formation. He notes that there has been a recognition that things have not been handled correctly or at least not well. People are coming to churches for salvation, but are they living a transformed life? He states, "We have counted on preaching, teaching, and knowledge or information to form faith in the hearer, and have counted on faith to form the inner life and outward behavior of the Christian. But, for whatever reason, this strategy has not turned out well" (Willard, 2006). So, it appears there has been a separation of the Christian by name and a Christian that has experienced genuine life transformation. Yet, 2 Corinthians 3:18 (English Standard Version) reveals, "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." Thus, if transformation of an

individual, revealed through their character, is not occurring, the church must assess what they have been expecting to produce a godly life, and compare this to what Christ revealed is imperative for living a transformed life.

Consequently, this emergence of the topic of spiritual formation is more paramount than ever. The church must begin to move away from believing hearing the Word alone in a church service will produce a life changed for Christ. Rather, they need to reexamine Christ's call and ensure that their call unto believers, and those newly coming to Christ, carries the same weight. Through personal and theological examinations as well as an applicational glance of spiritual formation active in an organization, this paper seeks to explore the basics of spiritual formation and what it can mean for the future of the church.

Personal Views of Spiritual Formation

While churches should seek to bring unbelievers to salvation found in Christ, many churches and/or Christians have settled for a passive view of salvation. Salvation is frequently recognized as the deliverance of sin and death. M. Robert Mulholland Jr. (2011), in his article "Spirituality and Transformation," notes that many view salvation as "what happens when a person responds to God's cruciform love in Christ and accepts Christ as Savior and Lord" (p. 218). However, the salvation of the New Testament was not a momentary action or decision. Paul refers to "being saved." Thus, salvation is a process in which the primary goal will remain to be matured into a likeness of Christ, and it must not be viewed as a starting nor ending point (Mulholland, 2011). While salvation is the entry way into heaven or the Kingdom of Heaven, it should be acknowledged that Christ preached that there remains a Kingdom of God on earth as in Heaven—presently expressed and yet the full realization remaining for the future (Light).

Therefore, in this Kingdom of God on earth occurs the process of salvation in which cannot be separated from regeneration.

“In the [New Testament] generally, regeneration motifs denote both the salvific, spiritual transformation already begun in human beings by the work of Christ and the expectation of a future new creation,” as noted in Alexandra R. Brown’s (n.d.) study of regeneration. Thus, the transformational process of becoming like Christ cannot be removed from salvation, only to leave it as a momentary decision and not a lifelong commitment. Consequently, salvation becomes the starting point on a journey of knowing God more, becoming more Christlike, and being transformed into God’s image. Mulholland (2011) notes that, “Christian spirituality then involves a process of transformation, of being nurtured and restored to wholeness in the image of God through a growing relationship of loving union with God in Christ through the Holy Spirit” (p. 218). Thus, the salvific moment of conversion begins a lifelong commitment to coming to know Christ more and being transformed into His likeness flowing from such.

However, it would still do injustice to what God did through his saving grace to pretend that this leaves enough for a new Christian to understand how to accomplish this and what it should truly look like. It is the grace of God in salvation that takes a person’s character, the things they naturally do, how they naturally relate with others, how they naturally respond to situations, and simply how they live their lives and transforms it to all look like Christ’s. Furthermore, to begin to look like Christ, there are key steps to take as a Christian. First, to be like Christ, we must get to know Christ. Gordon T. Smith (2011) notes that, “Conversion is, then, a decision to become a learner, a disciple, who attends to the teaching ministry of Jesus as revealed or communicated by the Spirit through the Scriptures and the faith tradition of the Christian community” (p. 85). As Christians value learning about Christ and what a Christlike

life looks like and begin to value the work of the Spirit as the Scriptures teach, the sentimentality of an only spiritual relationship will begin to fade, and a transformational relationship founded in knowledge of the Word, practice of its teachings, and allowance of the spiritual dynamic will release authentic life change (Smith, 2011).

Accordingly, as noted in Smith's observation, a disciple is one who naturally does what Jesus did. This is a character change that occurs through the learning of Jesus, as previously mentioned. In addition to this, it must be recognized that today's Christians have too often tried to make a separation between their salvific conversion experience and discipleship. However, one cannot be like Christ and not disciple others. This is to profess to be a Christian yet believe that one does not have to follow Christ (Hull, 2016). Discipleship is the grounds in which a transformed life is lived. Bill Hull (2016) notes, "We've defined discipleship as optional, a choice and not a demand. For many who call themselves Christians today, being saved or being a Christian has no serious connection with an ongoing commitment to being formed into the image of Christ" (p. 21). Thus, the second key for a Christian is to commit to a life of active discipleship.

Ultimately, spiritual formation occurs through the submission of our will and character to the regeneration of the Holy Spirit. This requires action to be taken in order to put off the "old man" and put on the "new man" (Eph. 4:22-24). There must be intentional pursuit of the disciplines of the faith. These are the primary means in which Christians can begin to experience this new life. Disciplines such as solitude, prayer, fasting, worship, study, fellowship, etc. will be the founding place for a renewed life. Although they are not requirements for salvation nor should they become religious striving for God's approval, these begin to "allow the spirit or will—an infinitesimally tiny power in itself that we cannot count on to carry our intentions into

settled, effectual righteousness—to direct the body into contexts of experience in which the whole self is inwardly restructured to follow the eager spirit into ever fuller obedience” (Willard, 2006).

In summary, spiritual formation is the process that a person enters at salvation in which they spend their lives being transformed such that their natural expressions are like that of Christ. Their character flows from the modeled character of Jesus and the biblical moral standards woven in Scriptures. The actions, the vocabulary, the power, the discipleship of Christ should begin to spring innately from the individual. Willard (n.d.) sums spiritual formation, in the Christian tradition, to, “the process of transformation of the inmost dimension of the human being, the heart, which is the same as the spirit or will.”

Personal Reflections & Plan for Spiritual Formation

In my own journey of spiritual formation, my parents have been the most inspirational standard in which to learn from. My father grew up in church, was called to ministry at an early age, and lived a fairly good life. However, in late high school until he was in his late twenties, my dad lived a life very far from God. Due to some hardships and life decisions, he left his relationship with the Lord and ran hard in the opposite direction. By the time I was born, he had recently returned to the Lord, so I watched his transformational lifestyle and his continual growth toward living a renewed life. Additionally, my mother was not raised around church and did not even know about Christ until her early twenties. She had come to the point of conversion by the time I was born, but the transformational aspect of her life had just begun. Since I was little, I have watched my mother become more and more like Jesus. She still daily submits part of her humanness to Christ, but I’ve grown up hearing her preach about and talk about being a “new

creation” or “transformed by Christ.” These spiritual formation terms were standard verbiage of my childhood.

Constructing a plan for spiritual development in my life stands as incredibly timely in my current season. This semester has held many life transitions, and I am now coming to a settling in many of these. These transitions have brought me to a place where more than ever I have to be intentional in continuing to grow in my relationship with Christ. I am no longer surrounded by Christian coworkers nor directly involved in ministry for accountability. Thus, it is of utmost importance in this season to develop an intentional plan for continuing to prepare and develop myself for walking in my calling and returning to ministry in the near future. This season has tried my time in the Lord’s presence, my peace, and my personal time. These are all elements in which I want my spiritual development plan to address, and I want to take these back in this next year.

First, I need to develop a schedule that works solitude and silence back into my life. In this season, I have learned the difference between being alone and being alone with God. Living by myself and having time just being by myself is not enough to cultivate a presence where God is welcome. In February of this year, God asked me to let him speak and communicate with me. He reminded me that he longs to love on me just as much as I am to love on him. He reminded me that communication is imperative to a relationship, and as discovered in this class, my relationship with God is where I continue to be transformed into the image of him. He corrected how quickly I say a few words to him then move on with life, slipping straight through his presence. This is not transformational solitude or silence. God desires that I create a home where I can not only get away from the world but getaway to him. He desires for me to silence myself long enough to hear him speak and allow him to refine me through his love.

One of the biggest reasons this season lacked in receiving his love was because I was not intentional to make time for it and plan my schedule with enough ease that I would have peace to just wait on him. I am ready to stop being prideful with my own time and allow God to have his way in the inner depths of my heart and will. Philosopher, Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung reveals how busyness and restlessness falls under slothfulness, and she notes that the reason is because slothfulness is a vice of resisting God's transformational moments (DeYoung & Foster, 2018). The biggest area in which I hope to see spiritual development is in making God the God of my time and schedule. As a "type A" person, the quickest area that I insert my self-sufficiencies is in my schedule and busyness. However, I know that I will never be as effective as a Christian until I let God transform this area of my life.

Second, I know my relationship with God would grow exponentially if I fasted. For years, I have convinced myself of excuse after excuse as to why I could not fast. Whether it had to do with my workout schedule, blood sugar issues, or my busy schedule, admittedly, I can count the number of times I have fasted food on one hand. Pride so easily slips into this discipline when I find reasons not to fast or hoard away food in earlier meals in preparation for times of fasting because it is saying that I am not trusting God (DeYoung & Foster, 2018). This class has brought me to this realization, and I am grateful for this. I do not want to limit God from truly being my provider and fulfilling every kind of need. Hence, I plan to regularly fast and allow God to speak to me in a new way.

Another key aspect that this season has made me acutely aware of my need for is godly relationships, specifically a mentor. I need a mentor for the sake of accountability, empowerment, and refining certain areas of my life. As I am not surrounded with godly people on a day-to-day basis due to being a teacher in the public school system, all the more I need

someone to pour into my life and help to keep me aware of areas in my life that need growth.

Also, I need to find a mentor that can speak into my future and the ministry that I want to open one day. When working a secular job, it is easy to push aside ministry in my life right now.

However, I recognize that if I do not prepare my heart and will for it now, I may never be able to do the things God has previously laid on my heart. The action steps mentioned as a necessity in spiritual formation in the previous section cannot happen only when being in direct ministry.

Rather, I must take the necessary steps now to continue growing and refining myself to be ready for that season to be here. I have already begun the steps to add this into my life. I have connected with my pastor's wife, and she is connecting me with some women that have pursued similar passions as I have expressed to her.

Lastly, no spiritual development plan is complete without time spent in worship and the study of the Word of God. This remains paramount for growth as it is the primary means to come to know Jesus more and thus be transformed into his likeness. I plan to ensure that my daily time with God is intentional and interactive. I should not only read but reflect, listen, and journal with this time. I have not been good about consistently interacting with the living Word of God. However, I recognize the living Spirit of God is ready to speak and transform through the study of God's Word when I open myself to that. This is the foundational step to growing and being transformed into the likeness of Christ. The more I grow in this area, the easier solitude, fasting, and vulnerability in mentorship relationships will be possible.

Theological Reflections on Spiritual Formation

The concept of spiritual formation is uniquely woven throughout both the Old and New Testament. From Jesus' teachings to Paul's theology founded primarily on God's life transforming power, the New Testament reveals clearly the necessity and the process in which

Christians must go about pursuing spiritual formation. The transformation of one's inward self to become an outward expression that is representative of Christ himself remains a byproduct of true salvation. Neither Jesus, Paul, nor Peter, as the primary new covenant writers/speakers, communicate a type of salvation that leaves man the same way in which he first came into relationship with God. They express a theology of spiritual formation that not only leads to every Christian being a new creation, and thus having new desires and actions aligned to Christ, but also one in which calls God's people to take part in the transformation of others as well.

In John 3, a Pharisee, named Nicodemus, came to Jesus at night to question his source of power and authority in the operation of the miraculous. Jesus does not marvel on the supernatural acts Nicodemus mentions, but he turns the direction of the conversation toward regeneration. Regeneration meaning "putting new capacity into a person's immaterial nature" (Hull, 2016, p. 90). Jesus redirects the pluralism found in Nicodemus's comments and addresses his own state of salvation. By the Pharisaic views, Nicodemus would have believed that he would enter the kingdom of God through Jewish heritage (Kruse, 2003). However, Jesus reveals not only his need to be "born again" into the kingdom but that the truth of genuine salvation cleanses and regenerates a person. Jesus reveals that entrance into the kingdom occurs only through a rebirth, which implies a change in one's identity and thus character. To be born again leads to one living a complete and new life in Christ. This does not mean one will experience an immediate transformation, but it releases a life that is full of potential to be developed through obedient discipleship and disciplines (Hull, 2016).

In Mark 7:14-23 and Luke 6:43-45, Jesus teaches on the inward orientation of a person. Mark 7:20-23 (English Standard Version) states, "And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual

immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.” Naturally, humans are selfishly oriented to evil and worldly appeals. However, Jesus’ purpose in revealing such truths is to allow his followers to come to the realization that external rituals do not matter as greatly as the need for one’s heart to be cleansed and transformed by God (Grassmick, 1983). Subsequently, as revealed in Luke 6:45, when this inner man is transformed into a new creation, with new motives and character, through the process of spiritual formation, it is that which is in his inner nature that yields the kind of fruit that he bears as a disciple of Christ (Morris, 1988). Christians then must go through a pruning process to bear the good fruit of Christ.

In John 15:2 (English Standard Version), Jesus reveals the necessity of bearing godly fruit by saying, “Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.” The Greek word translated to prune in this passage in John 15 can be understood to mean “to clean” or “to purify” (Kruse, 2003). In order to experience a divine fruitfulness and experience the fullness of being a disciple of Christ, Christians must willingly submit to the process of pruning or ridding ourselves of that which God sees as a hinder to living a fruitful life. God is always more interested in developing and changing things within his people before developing things from them. John 15 reveals where this pruning of his disciples occurs. In order to bear more fruit, God cleansed the disciples through the word Jesus spoke to them, and consequently, the disciples’ response to the word they heard through the teaching of Jesus transformed them into fruitful people (Kruse, 2003). Christians must allow God to prune, but acting upon the Word of God releases this cleansing and allows for a fruitful character to shine through them.

While this alone only scratches the surface of Jesus' address to living a transformed life, few biblical examples live out and speak on a life of spiritual formation as Paul does. Romans 12:2 (English Standard Version) states, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." The mind is the necessary starting place for the process in which spiritual transformation occurs in the life of a believer. The mind is the place in which decisions and acts of the heart occur, and these are what must be in cooperation with God's will to see a change in character and a life reflective of Christ's. It is our will or seat of action that is formed into character as our decisions become natural or habitual (Willard, n.d.). Hull (2016) explains this, stating that, "Transforming behavior requires transforming the mind because the mind is the seat of the will and desires and directs action" (p. 116). Paul encourages Christians in the pursuit of aligning their will to the transformed will of God for their life in Philippians 2:12-13 (New International Version) stating, "Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose." Thus, God is the force in which assists in the changing of our actions and will to align with his.

Through Paul's references of his own spiritual transformation and his frequent use of virtue and vice lists to contrast the life of a transformed follower of Christ and those that do not have a relationship with Jesus, it remains evident that Paul's heart longed to see the people of God internally changed to the degree in which external manifestations of that change occurred. Paul encourages Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:7 (English Standard Version) saying, "... train yourself for godliness." Paul not only imparted a vision to pursue but revealed the training process in

which Timothy must concentrate his life towards—this is that of perseverance and discipline (Hull, 2016).

Paul's desire to see lives transformed was not restrained to the leaders in which he developed. In Galatians 4:19 (English Standard Version), Paul exclaims his anguish over the Christians of Galatia, "until Christ is formed in you [them]." This reveals his belief in the imperativeness of growth in Christ to achieve Christ-likeness (Cole, 1989). Paul does not hesitate to express the need for people to put away their sinful nature in order to inherit the Kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19-21). Rather, he reveals the character qualities that should go in their place as God's people follow the desires of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). Thus, "part of discipleship is learning to put to death our sinful desires and cultivate desires that align with God's Spirit (Hull, 2016, p. 118). Paul states in Galatians 5:24-25 (English Standard Version), "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."

Peter writes with the primary focus of calling the people of Christ to a higher place of living and walking in obedience to Christ. 1 Peter 1:14-16 (English Standard Version) reads, "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." Peter illuminates a continued focus on doing away with what one would naturally do and rather choosing to live a life like Christ. Peter not only references the living of a transformed life, but he continually brings the Christ follower to a sobering realization of what obedience to Christ looks like. 1 Peter 2:21 (English Standard Version) states, "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps." As the Spirit transforms one's life and calls them into a deeper love for Christ and to

walk in his example, a framework for the Christian's transformed life is revealed. Christians are called to follow and obey Christ, to imitate his character, because he suffered for them (Raymer, 1983). Thus, to live in such obedience takes the call of following Christ beyond one's own transformation.

Jesus' final command and the Great Commission of his disciples is to, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20 English Standard Version). Thus, as a follower and disciple of Christ, passivity or self-centeredness is a paradox to living a transformed life in Christ. While an important element of spiritual formation is the inward regeneration to become more like Christ, the true fulfillment of this transformation is when full obedience to Christ is embraced. Thus, discipleship and salvation cannot be removed from each other. Willard (n.d.) argues that, "We have a form of religion that has accepted non-obedience to Christ, and the hunger for spirituality and spiritual formation in our day is a direct consequence of that." To answer the call to "Follow me..." (Matt. 4:19) is to choose to accept the call to disciple others and bring them into a life-transforming relationship with Christ, too. Jesus's basic expectation for his people is to "make disciples of all nations" and "teach these new disciples to obey" (Hull, 2016, p.106). Therefore, spiritual formation must not be removed from the call to discipleship. "Spiritual formation in Christ is accomplished, and the Great Commission fulfilled, as the regenerate soul makes its highest intent to live in the commandments of Christ, and accordingly makes realistic plans to realize this intent by an adequate course of spiritual disciplines," notes Willard (2006). A theology of spiritual formation then begins through the transformation of the

inner-being to become more Christlike and manifests as the full, active, and outward obedience to Christ's every command.

Action Plan for Spiritual Formation

Leadership

Many Christian leaders feel as though they have grown past the stage of following (Miller, 2007), or if this is not their sentiment, some still lack in the realization of the power of following first in leadership. Jesus' call to his disciples, as he called them from the boat into their new leadership position, was to "Come, follow..." It was from this place of following that the disciples became leaders that still have influence over changing lives today through their writing. Ultimately, as spiritual formation is the transforming of our will into Christ's and becoming a true disciple of him, it should be noted that, "Servant leaders follow Jesus by doing what he says to do first in whatever context they find themselves" (Wilkes, 1998). Christ has called his follower to the discipling and teaching of others (Matt. 28:19-20). Thus, a leader's spiritual formation should begin to look like valuing others above one's self and following Christ's example of leadership. This leadership is "follower-centered, implying that the cultivation of relational skills continues to be of prime importance for people involved in it" (Åkerlund, 2016, p. 32). As Christ washed the feet of his disciples and taught them of submission, humility, and servanthood, so shall the Christian leader today. Helping others to grow in their spiritual walks takes a high commitment to do the things Jesus did or directs even when it is uncommon.

Today's Christians

A notable threat to Christians living spiritually transformed lives is a modern phenomenon referred to as "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism," in which Christians believe that God

remains at a distance expecting his people to be good and nice to one another, and then, he will intercede when called upon (Carver, 2015). However, this self-focused mindset is the reason the topic of spiritual formation has begun to see a rise in popularity. Many people are realizing there must be more, and they seek to find such. In reality, true spiritual formation is the only answer to a culture who is in any way living with a “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism” view of God. Spiritual formation is to embrace God’s spirit and working in one’s life and allowing him to transform them into the likeness of Christ. Thus, far from self-centered, Christians must be driven by a Kingdom of God motivation to pursue spiritual disciplines. Spiritual disciplines in the life of a believer are essential to the development of one’s life in Christ (Willard, 1998). Combined with the study of the Word of God and the movement of the Spirit, spiritual disciplines are crucial to the spiritual formation process. Willard states the following regarding spiritual disciplines and their work in spiritual formation:

But people who are not totally shattered, and who have experienced the "birth from above," can usually, with simple instruction and encouragement, begin to make real progress toward wholeness by practices such as solitude and silence, fasting, scripture memorization, regular times of corporate and individual praise and worship, and so on. The various disciplines minister to different and complementary aspects of our wrungness and brokenness (Willard, 1998).

I believe a key element, as alluded to by Willard, to spiritual formation is accountability through mentorship and/or coaching. This will ensure the instruction and encouragement necessary to see lasting growth and transformation. Nonetheless, to discipline oneself to the Word, prayer, time with the Spirit, other transforming disciplines, and under the care of a trusted godly leader will inevitably change someone to become more like Christ each day.

Successful and lasting spiritual formation does not occur in a day nor without an adjustment to one's daily life and/or schedule. To desire to be transformed spiritually requires one to create daily routines and allow God to meet them in those. It requires intentionality and surrender. A potential growth plan for a Christian in any stage of their faith is as follows:

- Begin an intentional growth season with prayer to seek God for his will for your life.
- Write down vision/mission statements for this season, the year, your life. Create an end goal.
- Identify actions or tasks to stimulate growth spiritually, relationally, emotionally, and physically.
- Set reasonable and measurable goals on how to accomplish growth in the listed areas.
- Continue to pray over it.
- Share the plan with at least one trusted individual to hold you accountable throughout this formation process.
- Activate the plan. Be consistent, faithful, and committed to your growth.

Above is a very rudimentary beginning place for developing a plan for spiritual growth. In church leadership, one should have an easily accessed track for people to follow and make relevant adjustments. Some possible strategies to ensure this growth is occurring in a church are:

- Have a "Next Steps" or "Welcome to the Family" area in which those that are new to the church or new to the body of Christ can easily access a community and material to learn about their faith and the church.

- Create a mentorship program where seasoned Christians that have allowed God to transform their lives mentor those that are struggling to see God as more than a help when called on.
- Develop a small groups curriculum, adaptable to all ages, to take the church members on the journey of discovering the process of spiritual formation.
- Plan a sermon series to address spiritual formation.
- Develop a devotional to giveaway to members that focuses on spiritual growth.

While these are only a few practical possibilities for a church to implement, it remains imperative that a church challenges their people to discover the true meaning of spiritual formation and obedience to Christ.

Conclusion

Christians are daily faced with a litany of decisions to make on a day-to-day basis regarding the life they will portray. As explored in this paper through the examination of modern writers, personal beliefs, theological reflections, and suggestions for application, it remains imperative that churches embrace a theology of spiritual formation. Christians have been living a cheap life where salvation remains both the beginning and the end of their faith. They restrict themselves from the fullness of a life transformed by God. Particularly, Evangelical Christians should reexamine the meaning of being a disciple of Christ. A life converted and transformed by Christ cannot be removed from discipleship. Nonetheless, for the life of anyone professing to be a disciple of Christ, to be truly transformed, one must not only passively allow the Spirit to do his work but also actively pursue that which Christ called everyone to do. Seeking Christ, studying the Word, and pursuing spiritual disciplines will elicit lasting change in one's life. The more today's Christians live a life transformed by the working of the Holy Spirit and whose will

is aligned to that of Christ's, the more effective the church will be as the "light of the world" and a "city on a hill" (Matt. 5:14). Thus, as Paul summarizes in Philippians 4:8 (English Standard Version), "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you."

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